

Threads: The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

The Urgency of Eternity

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THE URGENCY OF ETERNITY Romans 6:23

As you find your seats, if you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I invite you to open with me to Romans 6. We come this morning to our last Sunday in this short series on threads of the gospel and personal evangelism. I have been encouraged by the stories you have sent me, many of you sending stories and some of you for the first time talking to somebody else about Jesus and what was so neat to see is that every single email I received, every single story somebody told me about sewing gospel threads, they were all marked by the surprising simplicity of proclaiming the gospel.

It really is simple. It's not easy. The adversary would like nothing more than keeping us from proclaiming the gospel. The adversary is just fine with us coming into a room, like we call it "going to church," singing like we're the church. He's got no problem with that. But when we leave this room and we speak like we are the Church, he's got problems with that, and he is dead set against that. So it's not easy but it is simple. It's what we're looking at. How do these threads of the gospel permeate our every day conversations?

And what we're going to do this morning is dive into this fifth thread and then kind of take a broad look of all of them as they come together and I want us to see in this fifth thread why the gospel is so important.

We've dove into four threads at this point. Let's see if you can remember them. They're actually on your notes if you want to cheat. But if you want to look up and see if you can remember, when it comes to the character of God, we have said that God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. When it comes to the sinfulness of man we've seen in Romans 1-8 that we are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin, leads us, once we see those two, can't get to this point really until you see these first two, leads us to the sufficiency of Christ, that Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God, bring us to God. Now how does that become a reality in our hearts? How is the work of Christ, His life, His death, His resurrection, how is that appropriated for our salvation? It leads to the necessity of faith. We are reconciled to God only through, what? Through faith in Jesus, only through faith.

THREAD #5: THE URGENCY OF ETERNITY Our eternal destiny is dependent on our response to Jesus.

All of that leads to this last thread, thread number five, the urgency of eternity. This is why this news, this gospel, is important and why it's important to weave it into our lives because our eternal destiny is dependent on our response to Jesus. Our eternal destiny is dependent on our response to Jesus.

The gospel is important because eternity is forever and our response to Christ and the gospel determines where we will spend forever, where we will be forever. It raises the stakes of all of these threads.

Now this is all over Romans 1-8. In the very beginning, Romans 1:18-20, he's talking about God's eternal power. Romans 2 we see the picture of God's judgment. We've already looked at it. It's an eternal judgment.

What I want to show you though, based on what we've seen already, I want to show you what are the options when it comes to this response. What are the two options that are before us based on what we've already seen and then I want to show you how Romans 1-8 takes those options and raises the stakes when it comes to eternity.

The options are this, and you've got this in your notes. Will you turn away from Jesus or will you turn to Jesus? Will you turn from Jesus or to Jesus? This is picking up where we left off last week. We talked about turning and trusting and really the ultimate question with which the gospel confronts this is will you turn from Jesus or turn to Jesus. Every person in this room, every person on this planet, every person in all of history faces these two options, to turn from Jesus or to turn to Jesus and eternity is dependent on how we respond to those options. Life and death hang in the balance and there is no middle option.

What I want to show you, we've got Romans 1-4 that talks about this some but I want you to go with me to Romans 5. Go to Romans 5. Look at verse 9 with me. Here's what I want you to do. I want to invite you to take your pen or pencil and I want to invite you to circle every time you see the word and we're going to read just some long passages, I want to encourage you to circle every time you see the word life or live or lives, something like life, and death or die or died. Life and death, and I want you to circle and you're going to be circling most of the time here, I want you to circle every time you see life or death and some of them won't have those words in them but they'll be setting up the context. So start with me in Romans 5:9. Get your pencils, pens ready. Here we go.

"Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son," circle it there, "how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation." Verse 12, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned—for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come" (Rom. 5:12-14).

You get down to verse 16, skip verse 15. Verse 16, *"...the gift of God is not like the result of the one man's sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man,"* talking about Adam here, "Death," there it is, *"death reigned through that one man,"* death reigned through Adam, *"how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in,"* what? *"Life through the one man, Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:17).* He's contrasting Adam/Jesus. *"Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:18-19).*

He closes out this chapter and says, *"The law was added so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that, just as sin reigned in,"* what? *"In death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (Rom. 5:20-21). So you've got it all over chapter 5.

Then you get to chapter 6. Look with me in verse 3 of chapter 6. *"Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."* Verse 5, *"If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."* Get down to verse 8, *"Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all"* (Rom. 6:8-10). You getting all these? *"But the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life"* (Rom. 6:10-13).

Go to the very end of this chapter, verse 19. We'll kind of set the stage here and we'll see at the end of this paragraph. Paul says, *"I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of?"* (Rom. 6:19-21).

Here's what he says. You're a slave to sin, that means, *"Those things result in death!"* Sin results in death. *"But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life...in Christ Jesus"* (Rom. 6:21-23).

You get into chapter 7, just to keep you going. I just want you to see how there's this constant interweaving between these two terms. Get to chapter 7; go down to verse 8 with me. Paul says,

But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful (Rom. 7:8-12).

You get down to the very end of this chapter in verse 24, he gives this frustrating cry. He says, *"What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!"*

Now that gets us into chapter 8, verse 2. Actually we'll just start in verse 1 there. *"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death"* (Rom. 8:1-2). Then he goes on, go down to verse 6 there. He's contrasting the mind of sinful man and the mind of the Spirit. He says, *"The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."* He elaborates on that. You get down to verse 11, *"if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God"* (Rom. 8:11-14).

You get all the way to the end of this chapter, verse 34, and he sums it up. He says, *"Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."* He talks about, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* He quotes from the Old Testament, *"As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.'" He says, "No ... we are more than conquerors,"* and that's when he says in verse 38, *"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,"* neither all these things, *"will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Rom. 8:35-39).

So here's the picture all throughout Romans 5, 6, 7, 8. We've got life and death, life and death. Now what I've tried to do looking at these texts this week is looking at them individually and then corporately, all together to try to summarize what Paul is showing us here about life and death when it comes to Christ because it all hinges on Christ. We've got two options here. You will either turn from Jesus or turn to Jesus.

Will You Turn From Jesus?

So let's take that first one. You turn from Jesus, and trying to use Paul's words here, summarize, it's not perfect, but summarize basically saying this is one option. We can choose to live without Christ now. You turn from Jesus and say, "I'm going to live without Christ." Live a slave to sin in Paul's language, slaves to ourselves. We do things our own way. Maybe we verbally, deliberately, maybe even publicly renounce Jesus. I don't want anything to do with Jesus. We decide that.

Or maybe it's more subtle. Maybe we go to church. Maybe we're involved. Maybe we believe that Jesus died on a cross and rose from the grave but we never come to the point where we personally encounter Him as the Lord of our lives. We live our lives our own way, live slaves to sin, slaves to ourselves, even though we give nominal adherence to Jesus. Superficial religion.

This is the picture. We choose to live without Christ now, whether it's deliberate or whether it's couched in being a member of The Church at Brook Hills. It's an option. We live without Christ now and the result is we will die without Christ forever. This is what Paul is saying. The wages of sin is death. The payment of sin is death. This is exactly what he set the stage for back in Romans 2.

In fact, turn back there with me. Romans 2, I want to read this passage again to you and I want you to hear these words. I want you to picture this imagery with me. Romans 2:5, listen to what Scripture says here. Paul writes these words,

But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. God "will give to each person according to what he has done." To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism (Rom. 2:5-11).

Whatever else this passage teaches, it teaches very clearly that after death there are two options. After death there is either eternal life, glory, and honor, and peace, or there is eternal wrath and anger and trouble and distress.

The reality Romans is putting in front of us today is this: every single person in this room and it could happen before this service is over, you could be thrust into one of these two options, irreversibly thrust into eternal life and glory and honor and peace or eternal wrath and anger and trouble and stress, eternal—forever.

What does it say? Verse 6, what does it say we're going to be judged according to? We'll be judged according to what we have what? "Done." We say, "Well we need to start doing then. I need to do as much as I can to be okay on that day." That misses the whole point of Romans.

The whole point of Romans is you can't do it. What man or woman in this room will be so bold as to think one day they will stand before almighty God, the one to whom you have infinitely offended with your sin and look at Him and say, "But look at all the good I did. You owe me life forever." Who is going to say that? I urge you not to think you'll say that. Paul says, you live without Christ now; you will die without Christ forever because the reality is there is only one who has done enough before God. There is only one who is right before God. He is Jesus. That's why, last week He alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God because His life displayed the righteousness of God.

So if there's only one who is able to take the wrath of God due you upon himself on your behalf, there's only one who can do that and in this life you say, "I don't want Him, then you will stand along before God on that day and you will be cast into a lake of fire forever, forever.

You say, "What? You really believe that?" Listen to the Bible. Listen to Jesus. Listen to Jesus, Matthew 10:28, *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather,"* this is Jesus' words, *"be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body,"* who can destroy your soul and body *"in hell."* Mark 9:43, listen to what Jesus says, *"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out."* It never goes out. *"If your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.'"*

It's Jesus. 2 Thessalonians 1:7 says, *Jesus will be "revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the*

presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Revelation 14:11, this is the author that gives us John 3:16—"...*God so loved the world.*" Revelation 14:11, he describes those in hell and he says, "...*the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night.*" Revelation 20:15, "*If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*" Verse 10 says, "*The smoke from their torment rises forever and ever*" (Rev. 14:11). It's the strongest word in the Greek language possible to describe time that does not ever end.

People say, "Do you really believe that's literal? Isn't that symbolic language?" Even if it were symbolic, what's it symbolic of? Snow? Vacation? Happy hunting grounds? The reality with which Scripture is confronting us here is that at the end of this life, at death, there is a road that is leading to eternal joy and there is a road that is leading to eternal everlasting suffering. Which road are you on?

There are many people who say we shouldn't talk about things such as this, many people in my place. Many preachers who would say, "Don't talk about that." Even some men I respect, greatly respect, who would talk about these things with an apologetic tone, who would talk about these things and almost have the sense of, "Sorry I have to say this but since it's in the Bible I guess I have to preach it." That makes no sense whatsoever. I mean, think about it. If there is a God and if there really is a heaven and if there really is a hell, if there really is a place of everlasting joy and if there really is a place of everlasting suffering, then would it make any sense for me to stand in front of you this morning and say, "Well I'd rather not tell you that eternal wrath is coming but since I have to I'm just going to warn you and move on?" No, no I would plead with you with everything that is in me not to turn from Jesus, to turn to Jesus.

I would plead with every child in this room, every child in this room, please give me your attention, every child in this room. This may seem like it's nowhere close to you because you're young. The reality is you may die at 8 years old or 18 years old or 88 years old. You don't know and you will either enter into eternal life or eternal death and everlasting suffering and you don't have to be afraid of that because God has sent His Son Jesus to die on your behalf. So I would urge every child in this room this morning turn to Jesus. Don't turn from Jesus any more. Turn to Jesus.

Every student in this room, every teenager in this room, the adversary would like nothing more than to fill your minds this morning with all of the stuff you have and all of the fun you've had this weekend and all the TV shows and the videogames and the movies and the Facebook pages that entertain you because he loves getting you so focused on those things that you have no clue there's an eternity that's coming, an eternal wrath or eternal life that is coming and none of those things, none of those things will matter in eternity. And I want to urge you this morning to turn not from Jesus, turn to Jesus. Trust in Him as Lord and Savior. Throw the temporary aside.

I would encourage every single man and woman, married men and women across this room, amidst the busyness of your careers and economy and struggles, amidst stocks and sports and amidst hiding behind your computers I would urge you to come out this morning, see a reality, the eternal reality that is waiting. It is eternal wrath and eternal life. Are you ready for that?

I would urge every older man and woman in this room not to wait another second, not to delay another minute. Turn your heart to Jesus. All across this room every single person in this room turn to Jesus right now in your heart. Turn to Jesus. Trust Him as Lord and Savior, as the one who has taken the wrath of God on your behalf to Himself, who's shown

the power of God over sin in the resurrection and He's done it for your salvation. Turn to Him and if you don't, if you don't turn to Him, if you live without Christ now, you will die without Christ forever.

Or Will You Turn To Jesus?

Will you turn to Jesus? What happens when you turn to Jesus? When you're born again and this gospel does become reality in your hearts? In the language of Paul, we die with Christ now. You say, "What do you mean, we die with Christ?" It means we're united with Christ in His death. We are "*crucified with Christ*," Paul says in Galatians 2:20. We die to our sin. We die to ourselves. We stop trying to do it on our own. We stop trying to get there. We stop trying to manufacture religion, relationship with God. We die to every effort we have, every ounce of pride we have. We die to sin. We die with Christ now, turn from sin, self, and trust in Him as Lord and Savior.

We die with Christ now and Paul says we will live with Christ forever, we'll live with Christ forever. If you are united, if we are united with Christ in His death, Paul says, we will certainly also be united with Him in His resurrection. Praise God, praise God that when we die with Christ now we will live with Christ forever. Praise God that when Gwen Brobst this last week breathed her last breath and met death, praise God that the jaws of sin were not there anymore because she had locked her heart with the heart of Christ and Christ stood on her behalf at that judgment picture in Romans 2 and said, "She is with me." Praise God. We die with Christ now, she lives, we will live with Christ forever, forever and ever and ever and that never ends. That's good news. That's gospel.

SEWING GOSPEL THREADS...

God is the just and gracious Creator of all things.

**We are each created by God, but we are all corrupted by sin.
Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God.**

We are reconciled to God only through faith in Jesus.

Our eternal destiny is dependent on our response to Jesus.

So what I want to do is I want to move directly into practical application here, sewing these threads. Urgency of eternity, our eternity is dependent on our response to Jesus, our eternal destiny is dependent on this. We've looked at these threads. God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. We are created by God but corrupted by sin. Jesus removes our sin. He alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God. We're reconciled to Him through faith in Jesus and our eternal destiny is dependent on this. So what I want to do is I want to take this last thread and think practically how do we share this thread and how do we let it affect the way we share all of these threads practically.

Minimize Your Conversations About Temporal Things

Number one, minimize your conversations. I want to encourage you to minimize your conversations about temporary things. We are inundated with the temporary. You look at much of our conversations, they are consumed by the temporary, things that may matter, they might matter for a moment, for a day, for a year. But they don't matter in eternity. You think about how much of our conversations, weather, food, sports, the number one topic of conversation this time of year, college football. God deliver us from thinking it matters. It doesn't matter. Who cares how Auburn or Alabama or Georgia do this year? Get a life. Get eternal life. What does it matter in eternity if your team got the pigskin across the grass field before the other team did? Who cares? People's lives are at stake for

eternity. This is 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. The God of this world is blinding minds of unbelievers saying temporary matters, temporary matters, and we are feeding the adversary. We feed the adversary's strategy by saying, "Yes these things matter, yes let's talk about these things. Let's ignore the fact that one day you or I will face God and we will go to heaven or hell." If that's true, that radically changes the way we talk and what we talk about.

Maximize your conversations about eternal things.

Minimize conversation about temporary things and maximize conversation about eternal things. Talk about what matters. Go below the surface. I'm not saying you always have to be some deep theological thinker or talker. I'm not saying you have to bore people, never have fun. But this is the whole point of this series. How can we take everyday conversations, everyday things in this world and point to eternal realities? I challenge you this week when you're driving in the car or when you're laying down in your bed at night just to think through your conversations that you've had that day, think through those conversations and just think, "What did I talk about that just doesn't matter and what did I talk about that was eternal? What did I waste my breath on that was temporary and what did I talk about that was eternal?" Look for opportunities to express eternal perspective on events, situations, circumstances.

Point blank, it changes the way you talk to people and email people and text people when you realize those people are going to spend the next billion plus years either in heaven or hell. That changes text messaging. Talk about eternal things.

Talking about responding to the gospel ...

Now talking about responding to the gospel, here's what I want to do. Go back with me to Acts 26. Just one book to the left. I want to show you something, Acts 26. The whole point of this series has been to talk about sewing gospel threads, this thread here and this thread there and the hope is, remember the whole goal is, not just to say a little word here or there, but the goal is to pray and look for opportunities to bring all of these threads together and to see someone, a coworker, a colleague, a friend, a neighbor, family member, to see someone's eyes for the first time opened to the beauty of the gospel and say, "Yes I see it, I see God and man and Christ and I see my need for Christ, my faith, and I see eternity." This whole picture opens before their eyes. I use that phrase. I want you to look with me in Acts 26. Look with me at verse 15. I want you to see this phrase. It just comes alive here.

This is Paul talking to Agrippa and he's recounting what Christ did in his life. So he's sharing his testimony basically and I want you to listen how he describes it. He says, "*Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles'*" (Acts 26:15-17). Listen to this phrase. "*I am sending you to them,*" this is Jesus saying to Paul, "*I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me'*" (Acts 26:17-18). Is that not incredible? What a picture! God says, "Paul you're going to go, you're going to open their eyes and they're going to go from darkness to light because you're going to open their eyes. They're going to go from the power of Satan to the power of God. You're going to open their eyes."

Now we know, we know from all we've seen in this whole series looking at the gospel, Lifeblood, that only God can do this. You can't manufacture this. You can't just go up to somebody and open them, just happens. It's not the way it works. But how does God open

eyes? Through your mouth, through your mouth; you speak gospel, He opens eyes. This is the way the Spirit works, through the proclamation of the gospel. It is as simple as this. You speak the gospel. God is the just and gracious Creator of all things. Jesus alone is able to remove our sin and reconcile us to God. We share the gospel and there's power there. This is how God is opening eyes. What else can you talk about that when these words are coming out you know there is supernatural power in these words that you're speaking to change someone's life for all of eternity? Is there anything else that you can talk about over lunch? What a cool thought. You speak it and it's like power there and it's opening lives. People's lives are being changed. What an amazing picture.

So here's the beauty. Every one of us in this room knows Christ, has Christ in us, the Spirit of Christ in us, has the privilege of being a part of introducing people to Christ in this way. So what I want to do is I want to encourage you to think four quick ways but as you share the gospel bring it all together. I want to encourage you.

Number one, be clear, be clear. This is why I've tried to challenge and encourage you to memorize these different threads. Yesterday at the funeral of Gwen I got to the end and I said, "It all comes down to this. God is the just and gracious Creator of all things." I just kind of went—it was just 30 seconds or a minute—this is the gospel. It doesn't take long, doesn't take long at all.

It's not to say people won't ask you questions. There might be things you need to explain a little bit more here or there depending on who you're talking to. But be clear. This is why I want us to be a faith family that is clear on the gospel in our minds and clear with the gospel in our mouths. If we're not clear on this we've missed the boat. We need to be clear with the gospel in our minds and with the gospel in our mouths and then based on that I want to encourage you to trust in the power of the gospel.

Please hear me on this. You don't need to change it. You don't need to make it more palatable for this person or that person or this situation or that situation. You don't need to justify this or that. There are a lot of people who would say you do need to do that. There are a lot of preachers who would say you need to do that. You need to take the gospel and make it more palatable for our culture today.

And I just want to fill you in on something. The Spirit of God has been at this for over 2,000 years and He's got it down pretty good and there's nothing that's going on in our culture today that's causing God to say, "Man if I just thought of that I would have changed the gospel so they could make it known in the 21st century. I'm sorry I left you hanging." He has not left us hanging. He has given us the gospel, Romans 1:16, that "*is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*"

The way it's couched, oftentimes people will talk about augmenting the gospel, changing the gospel in order to make it more palatable in our culture, in order to make it more effective. That's the word people use, "effective" in our culture. It's almost like we think we're doing something good by changing the gospel. We are not taking; we're not doing God a favor by taking the gospel out of evangelism and putting our own words instead. That's arrogance. That's self-centered arrogance. It misses the whole point.

The point is it's not about your words, it's about His words, it's about the gospel and you can trust the power of this gospel. So be clear on it, and know that there's power in it. I'm not saying it's easy. The Adversary is after this but it is that simple. It is that simple. Be clear. Trust the power of the gospel.

Second, be Christ-centered. Here's what I mean by that. Christ is the center of the gospel. You are not calling people to embrace truths. It's the danger of these threads. You're not calling people to embrace truths. You're calling people to embrace a person. Does that make sense? You're not calling people to adopt your religion. You're calling people to be adopted into a relationship, big difference. You're not calling people to espouse your way of life and your beliefs. You're calling people to submit their lives to Jesus. So keep the emphasis on Jesus. Point people to an encounter with Jesus. Do everything you can to point people to an encounter with Jesus.

Now I want to drift off for a moment here into a little side note and I'm going to try to make it quick, try to make it quick. There are some from different backgrounds or traditions that wonder why does David not give an invitation in his sermons. Some of you have never thought about that. Some of you have wondered a lot about that and some have even, might even go so far as to say David doesn't want people to come to Christ. I want to encourage you not to go there.

At the same time I want to share with you what my thinking is, my hope based on Scripture on this. I don't think there's a right or wrong answer in this whole discussion. The Elders and I, we've had a variety of discussion about these sorts of things, good discussions, and men I respect greatly, learned from, all kinds of things, we have different views on different things. But I actually believe that I do give an invitation like every Sunday. In fact I actually think I've already given an invitation today. "Turn to Jesus, turn to Jesus, every child, every student, every adult. Turn to Jesus. I plead with you to turn to Jesus."

Now what I've not done, we sometimes do something like this but rarely, I've not invited you to come down to the front to talk to somebody and I've not invited you to raise your hand. But I am convicted that we have created a very man manufactured and man centered faith that avoids personal encounter with Christ, and I'm grieved over this. That's the whole point of this series. We pray prayers, we sign cards, we walk aisles. Somebody tells us we did what we're supposed to do. The whole point is there's nothing you can do. That's the whole point.

And so, proclaim the gospel, I want to proclaim is clearly and I want to urge you, I hope and pray with passion, I want to urge you to respond to the gospel. But I want to point you to Jesus. I want to point you to Jesus. Now I'm not saying that other people aren't helpful. People are part of the proclamation of the gospel. This is why in the end of every service I'm down here, I want to be available. We have an access corner, people available at the end of every service. But not just me or them, the beauty is we're the church in this room and so we're available to each other to help point each other to Jesus. The good news is there's not an authorized agent in this room that you need to go to that has a nametag that says, "I can lead you to Christ." This is the privilege and the duty and the joy and the opportunity of every follower of Christ in this room. So turn to the people next to you and give invitations all the time, all the time. Point people to an encounter with Jesus.

Even last week when we were talking about the necessity of faith and I said faith is turning from sin and yourselves and trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior and I said trust in him, do it now, do it now, and then I kind of bolt off to the back of the stage and Stephen starts singing *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*, because my desire is to get out of the way as soon as possible so that you might encounter Jesus. I don't want you to be able to hide behind anything, any religious routine. Tell me the box to check and I'll do it. That's all of our mentality and I want to run from that mentality and say, "No there's not a box you can check. Christ has to do this in your heart. So go to Him, go to Him now in your seat. Run to the front, kneel before Him if you want to. Go home and pray to Him, fall on your face

before Him.” It’s what Bill did. You heard his testimony. Here’s the gospel. Realize this is not a reality in my life, he’s wrestling with it, he falls on his face at home and says, “Christ save me, save me.” Yes, point people to an encounter with Jesus here, there, at work, at home, in your neighborhood. Just point them to Jesus and proclaim the gospel, urge people to respond to the gospel, not just passive, but then once you do it, let Jesus to the work.

It leads to this next one, be confident and by that I mean trust the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is good. The Spirit of God is able to draw people to Himself. We don’t sit back and do nothing. We’ve been called by the Spirit to be proclaimers of the gospel but when we do, once we proclaim the gospel, then let the Spirit radically change their heart. Even for us, don’t try to manufacture that.

Listen to this. This book, *Soul Winning Made Easy*. Don’t buy it. Don’t buy it. Listen to this author who talks about a soul winning plan. He refers to Christians as salesmen with the gospel and this is what he says. I’m not lying. “The trained soul winner can bring his prospect to a decision for Christ. There’s no middle ground as he moves with surety and deftness right up to the point of salvation. It is his conversation control that makes this possible. The controlled conversation technique is something new in evangelism and represents a real breakthrough in soul winning.” He continues and encourages, “Get your prospect alone. Then lay your hand firmly on the subject’s shoulder or arm with the semi-commanding tone of voice and say to him, ‘Bow your head with me.’ Note, do not look at him when you say this but bow your head first out of the corner of your eyes you will see him hesitating first. Then as his resistance crumbles his head will come down. Your hand on his shoulder will feel the relaxation and you will know when his heart yields. Bowing your head first causes terrific psychological pressure.” Terrific psychological pressure.

I want to run as far as I can away from that as possible. I’m not saying that people who do invitations in different ways that I might look at invitation or doing that, but I want to exalt gospel and the Spirit of Christ in this picture and I want to encourage you when it comes to this picture.

You don’t have to manufacture this so that you can pray with someone and then pronounce them saved. It’s not your job. It’s not my job. We don’t give assurance of salvation. If my assurance of salvation is dependent on you I’m in a lot of trouble and likewise if your salvation is dependent on me. So depend on the Spirit and the Spirit is good for that. It’s his job. He’ll give the assurance of salvation. He will do this. The Spirit is good. So I want to encourage you with confidence on this, your ability to share the gospel is not dependent on your salesmanship. It’s dependent on the Spirit, the Spirit of God. So trust the work of the Spirit. He is good. He’s good. Be confident in that.

So just practically, I’m talking about this invitation wise in this corporate setting, when you’re talking with somebody, then yes, urge them, turn to Jesus, you can turn to Jesus now, you can pray to Jesus now, yes, yes. Or be okay with saying, “I encourage you to go home and wrestle through these things.” The beauty of it is the Spirit is going with them home, the Spirit’s there when they wake up in the middle of the night, opens their eyes to the gospel. He’s good at that. But it happens through our proclamation of the gospel, urging, but let the Spirit do the work.

Last, be careful. The last thing we want to do is abuse this eternally important moment in someone else’s life. Remember the goal is not decisions; the goal is disciples. The goal is not decisions. We’ve created this whole, it’s the whole kind of background of this series, the static decision. Okay you decide to get out of the line going to hell and get in the line going to heaven and that’s it and how do I do that, check off the box, okay now I’m saved. It’s

not Christianity. It's not biblical Christianity and it's not the gospel. The gospel is about making disciples. Walking somebody through that, some people might say that seems kind of passive. It seems like you're not investing in their life. No, this is letting the Spirit of Christ work in their life and be right alongside with them that entire time and laying down your life for them. It's what making disciples is all about and making disciples starts with the proclamation of the gospel. Okay that was not a short tangent. But anyway, okay, be careful.

Talking About Hell...

Talking about hell, bringing in this thread, speak about, I want to encourage you to speak about God's judgment with humble fear. Speak about God's judgment with humble fear. If we speak about God's judgment with arrogance or superiority, then we undercut the gospel. I hope I've not done that in any way this morning.

We speak about God's judgment as those who would be right there under it were it not for the completely and utterly unmerited, undeserved grace of Christ in our lives. We speak about God's judgment like we're standing on Niagara Falls and we almost fell into the pit and someone reached out and grabbed us and the only reason we're not falling right now is because He holds onto us. That's how you speak about God's judgment—humble fear. Speak about God's wrath with honest compassion, honest compassion. It can't be manufactured. We're going to come back to that in just a minute after we sing.

Talking About Heaven...

Talking about heaven, let me encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity to talk about the hope of being with God. I want to emphasize there, being with God, when we talk about heaven, don't talk about mansions. Don't talk about stuff. Don't talk about when you get to heaven you're going to be able to play all the golf you want to.

This is the dwelling place of God. We want golf more than we want God? Don't talk about heaven like that. Don't talk about heaven as having all the greatest things in the world. We picture heaven, we talk about heaven like it's got all the finest amenities that this world has to offer. Ladies and gentlemen heaven is a place where the finest amenities of this world cannot compare with the fact that we are dwelling with God and we see His face and He wipes every tear from our eyes. Talk about that when you talk about heaven, being with God.

Take advantage of those opportunities and take advantage of every opportunity to talk about the fact that dying is gain. This goes back to what we talked about last week. To live is Christ, to die is gain. That is an amazing statement.

I want to bring it home. I've mentioned a couple times Gwen Brobst who this last year has fought a battle with stomach cancer and last Monday passed away. I want you to think about this with me. It's just an amazing story there and hopefully soon you'll have an opportunity to hear more of that story. But I want you to just picture this with me.

A week ago, a week ago at this time, Gwen was lying in her bed experiencing indescribable pain and her body enveloped by cancer. One week later, just a few short days later, she is enveloped by a multitude of heavenly hosts who cry out day and night, day and night, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty who was, who is, and who is to come." That's gain. That is great gain. Talk about heaven like it's gain.

Before we go any further I want us to pause and I want us to celebrate dying is gain and I want us to sing and I want us to shout like dying is gain. Will you stand with me?

BROOK HILLS AND THE URGENCY OF ETERNITY...

I want to invite you to open back up with me to Romans 9. We have spent time looking at Romans 1-8. We don't get it unless we understand Romans 9:1-5. I want to read this short passage to you and ask you three simple questions for us as a faith family when it comes to The Church at Brook Hill and the urgency or eternity. Romans 9:1, Paul writes,

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it in the Holy Spirit— I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Rom. 9:1-5).

Do We Realize People's Condition?

Three questions for this faith family, for this pastor. Number one, do we realize people's condition? The background of Paul's words in Romans 9 is made even clearer one chapter over in Romans 10. Romans 9, 10, 11 he's talking about the people of Israel, the Jewish people. He says over in Romans 10:1, he says, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:1-4). What Paul is saying is they have not believed. The majority of the Jewish people had rejected Christ and Paul goes from Romans 8:38-39, the most triumphant part of the gospel picture in all eight chapters in Romans, nothing, neither angels nor demons can separate us from this incredible love. He goes from triumph to weeping in one verse. Why?

He goes to weeping because he realizes if Romans 1-8 are true then that means that the Jewish people, his people, his family are separated from Christ and unless they turn to Christ, they will be separated from Christ forever and he realizes this and he uses words like "great sorrow" and "unceasing anguish".

It begs the question of us, "Do we believe Romans 1-8?" I mean, really, do we believe this gospel? We talk about it and we sing about it. Do we believe it's true? Because if we do I invite you to consider the ramifications with me.

6.5 to 7 billion people in the world today, can't even begin to fathom that kind of number and even the most liberal statistics which say Christianity involves no more than 1/3 of that number and that's including cultural Christians, political Christians, nominal Christians, but let's just assume for a second that that 1/3 includes all Christ's followers, that every single one of them, I've got reason to doubt that, great reason to doubt that, but let's just assume for a minute that every single one of them is a follower of Christ. That leaves 4.5 billion people who today are under the judgment of God and will go to hell when they die forever, forever, and a billion of them haven't even heard about the gospel.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've been here a little over two years now and we have made some small changes along the way, Rock the Block, see the church is one of those, and no change is ever going to be perfect. No question, this is a change that is driven by a desire to take the gospel to the streets of Birmingham. But I want to go on record before you as a faith family this morning in saying that this is a small change, a very small change, and we need to make drastic large changes in the days ahead. I know, I know that that makes you uncomfortable. It makes me uncomfortable. It means we're going to change the perceptions we have about church and it probably means that some will say the church is not going to do these things for me and my family then I'm going to find a church that does.

Others say what's wrong with the way things are? What's wrong? There's 4.5 billion people who are going to hell. That's wrong. While we individually and corporately spend our lives and our time and our money and our resources on ourselves. How can that be if we believe this? If 4.5 billion people are going to hell, then how can the question what about me and my family, how can it even enter to my heart or my mind? It's not possible. It makes no sense.

Especially when thousands of those people are in Birmingham right around me. Do we really believe that the people we work with, the people we live next to, do I believe this, do we believe that these folks that we're around every day that we see in the city, that if they don't know Christ that they will spend an eternity in torment where smoke rises up forever and ever and ever? Do we believe that?

Some of us don't. Some people, I know that some people will leave here today and not come back to Brook Hills because they can't believe that's true, can't believe what that guy is saying. It's really where the question is. Who believes it? Do we believe this? Because if we do, if we believe that people's condition is headed towards eternal torment, then 280 church world makes no sense anymore, no sense whatsoever anymore. That's a major disconnect and we think there's no way.

I don't know how this looks. You don't know how this looks but we must fast and pray and seek the Spirit of God and ask him, plead with Him to rip us, rip me, rip us all from our self-centered religious priorities into a gospel saturated God-centered global passion. I don't know how that looks. We've got to fall on our faces and ask Him to do it. Do we realize people's condition? If we do then we must go to our faces and at that point.

Do We Possess the Heart of Christ?

Number two, a question: do we possess the heart of Christ? Did you hear what Paul said here in Romans 9? It is one of the most unbelievable statements in all of Scripture. I don't even know how to preach it, how to express this, to say that I could wish I myself was cursed and cut off for Christ for the sake of those who are lost. What a statement. Cursed, anathema, under the wrath of God; it's as if Paul were saying, and he calls on Christ and the Spirit of God and says, "They testify this is true of me. I'm not making this up. I'm not manufacturing emotions to try to pull you to do something. This is true in me." If it's true it's hypothetical, he just said it. Paul just said there's no way this could happen but he says, "I could wish that I myself were cursed." It's as if Paul is standing over the brink of eternal damnation and he says, "I'll throw myself in right now so that you can have life. I'll give myself over to the wrath of God,"

And we think maybe, maybe we could say that for our kids. What about for our coworkers? What about for the people we walk next to in Birmingham? What about people in downtown Birmingham? What about, don't forget this is Paul talking about a people that were persecuting him, that were imprisoning him and stoning him and beating him. Could you

say over the brink of damnation I'll jump in for you, for all militant Muslims in the Middle East, right now I'll jump in for the sake of your salvation? Can we say that?

How can you say that? We talk about burden for the lost glibly. This is burden for the lost. Don't say I've a burden for the lost. Don't take that lightly. How do you have this kind of burden? Same idea, Galatians 3:13. Jesus became a what for us? We talked about at Easter. He became a curse for us. Same idea. Jesus endured the what of God? The wrath of God towards sin, the only way you can say this in Romans 9 is if that heart is in you and so the question before our faith family is do we possess the heart of Christ? Maybe even deeper, do we want the heart of Christ?

Before you answer that question, before any one of us answers that question, realize the road that it leads down. You ask for the heart of Christ and suffering for the gospel is natural and laying down and letting go of everything. Rich young man, sell everything you've got. Give to the poor. Then you'll have inheritance in heaven. It's hard for a rich man, it's hard for a rich church to enter into the kingdom of heaven. You ask for the heart of Christ, that changes everything. Do we want the heart of Christ? Do we realize what that would mean?

Do We Want Our Lives to Count?

Ultimately it leads to that third question, simply, do we realize people's condition, do we possess the heart of Christ, and do we want our lives to count? Do we want our lives to count? This is Paul, don't miss this, he's writing this in Corinth, writing the Book of Romans. He's headed to, you'll never guess where, Jerusalem, and he's been told, he'll be told after he writes this book, "Don't go to Jerusalem because you'll be imprisoned there, you'll be arrested there, you'll be persecuted there. Don't go there." Paul says, "I don't care." Acts 20-21, "I don't care. I am ready not only to be bound but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus." Big deal. Paul says, "My life doesn't count for here." Friends are urging him don't go to Jerusalem. He says, "My life doesn't count for here." He says in Acts 20:22-24, *"I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace."*

Now think about this with me. This is the urgency of eternity. The youngest child in this room has 80-90 years at the most left on this earth, a mere 80-90 years, followed upon thousands upon thousands upon millions upon millions upon billions upon trillions of years to follow. Who in this room really thinks, who of us really thinks that ten trillion years from now we're going to look back and think, "I wish I'd made more money. I wish I had more stuff. I wish I had a nicer house. I really wish I had nicer clothes. I wish I had more comfort. I wish I'd been more careful and stayed away from danger."

No we'll look back and see that our life was worth nothing to us because one thing counted, one thing counted, and it was the advancement of the gospel to the nations because we'll be surrounded by a multitude that no one can count ten trillion years from now, from every tribe and every people and every language and every nation and how big our house was or nice our clothes were or how nice our life was won't matter because we'll be sitting next to people who are experiencing eternal joy instead of eternal suffering. This is worth it. It's worth giving our lives for. What does that look like? God show us what this looks like. God help us not to waste our lives and help us not to waste this church when it comes to eternity.

So I want us to close this whole series by going to Christ, falling before Christ and I'm going to invite you now to pray across this room to pray individually, to pray as families, to pray together, to pray where you're sitting, to come and fall on our faces across the front here,

on the sides, I want us to go to Christ because we can't manufacture Romans 9 in our hearts. We can't manufacture this in our lives. We don't know what it all looks like. We need Christ to do it in us and I want to call us as a faith family, I want to call us to run to Christ and to ask him, "Give us your heart, help us to realize the reality of the things we're saying, help us to realize people's condition, and God help us to make our lives count." I invite you to pray with me. Mandi is going to sing over us. I invite you to pray whether you're in your seat, all across the front here, with someone or alone, out loud or silently. Let's pray and let's see Christ and ask Him to do this in us.

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