



## **THE CROSS AND CHRISTIAN PREACHING – PART 2**

### **1 Corinthians 2:1-5**

So, church, if you'll turn to that passage of Scripture in 1 Corinthians 2, let's honor the Lord through worship and studying His Word. While you're turning there, go ahead and grab the sermon notes page that's in your Worship Guide and use that to follow along. 1 Corinthians 2, you follow along as I read. The Apostle Paul writes to the church at Corinth:

*And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

Now, if you were with us last week, you know that when we come to this text what we're doing is exploring the convergence of two particular subjects. One that grows out of 1 Corinthians 1, and that is Paul's emphasis on the cross of Christ as the power of God. This is God's message of salvation. The other is this thing that we do, that we're doing right now, called preaching. And we're looking specifically at how we approach this deal together as a family of faith with pastors who preach and folks that listen and receive preaching and respond to it. How do we approach this thing together in a way that honors God, that accomplishes His purpose, and announces His glory?

Now in your Worship Guide there, I would just remind you about two reminders that we started off with last week. And they're really important for us to get in understanding how Paul gets to this subject first. On a list of all the subjects that we're going to deal with in the study of this book like divorce and marriage and singleness and sexual immorality and church discipline and leadership and all kinds of stuff, we are going to see how the Apostle Paul arrives at this place first on the list to deal with in the church at Corinth.

### **Reminders for the Church ...**

These were the two reminders. The first one: The message of the cross is the resource of God's power. That's what he puts on the table in 1 Corinthians 1. This message of the cross is God's power for salvation. And I would just take a moment to say to those of you that may be here tonight still on the journey of asking questions, exploring Christianity: We are so, so glad that you're here and that you're letting this be a part of that exploration. I just want to say to you: Hear this word tonight. Hear this part of this message if you don't hear anything else. This message of the cross is the resource of God's power to save you, to save all of us.

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). The apostles would later say, reflecting back on His life and ministry, "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This is God's way, and our prayer is that tonight, even while I'm talking, while we continue with this service, right there at your seat in your heart, you would cry out to God to save you in repentance and faith, trusting Jesus Christ and Him alone for your salvation. The message of the cross is the resource of God's power.

And then, that second reminder was this—and Paul talks about it in verse 1 and then brings it on into 1 Corinthians 2 in our Bibles—and that is the preaching of the cross is the response of God's people. It just makes sense. If this book is, in fact, the inspired Word of God, and this is God's Word to us, and it is the testimony, not just about Him but from Him, then when this Word is preached, when it is taught to us, when it is put before us, the natural thing that we do is say 'yes' to it, is respond to it by telling as many people as we possibly can about it.

That preaching plays out, in an informal sense if you will, in every one of our lives. As we go and we tell neighbors and co-workers and classmates and everybody we meet, we do things like "Rock the Block" in order to tell kids about this message of the cross. But, certainly, it beckons us to prioritize this formal preaching event in these gatherings that we have. This is the natural response of the message of the cross: That we proclaim it. And this is how Paul arrives at this first paragraph in 1 Corinthians 2 in our English Bibles, where he talks to the church about preaching.

## **Challenges for Pastors & People ...**

And so, we started talking about seven challenges for us as pastors and peoples last week. The four that we've already dealt with or listed there for you, the first two deal with the preaching event in general. This is something we own as a community of faith. It's not just what pastors do as a one-way street. But we're in this together, and we do it as an act of worship. We engage this event together as an expression of our worship. And then, we talked about two challenges related to the message. It's from God, not just about God, and in that we resolve to magnify this message—the message of Christ and Him crucified—above all else.

Now, there are three left, and tonight I want us to address those three. When we come to these last three challenges, I want us to think together about the motive or the goal or the end-game of preaching. Maybe another way to say it is, "What do we expect God to do in this preaching event, in the local church, here at Brook Hills? What are we anticipating that He would bring about?" So let's think about that kind of big-picture stuff as we unpack these last three.

### **Let's anticipate the Spirit's power in our weaknesses.**

So here's the first one; it's number five on the list. Let's anticipate the Spirit's power in our weaknesses. Together, let's make this a value, that we would anticipate God to move powerfully, to pour out His Spirit, but He would do it in this way that He has ordained—through our weaknesses.

Now, I want you to track with this, because I trust it will be an encouragement to many of us tonight. You know, when we come to verses 3 and 4 in this text right here, we come to a description of the Apostle Paul when he arrived in Corinth. He's saying, "This is what I looked like. This is what I sounded like. This is what my preaching was about when I came." And you know what? When you read those two verses right there, you come to the place quickly of understanding that this little Jew wasn't much to look at or listen to when he arrived in Corinth. I heard one pastor say, "He was uncool and he was uncalm."

And that's a pretty good description of us preachers. There's nothing cool about us, and there are all kinds of things that you and I together could make a list of that are characteristic of most preachers that make us uncool. This is not an uncool thing. We're not uncool people. We're not very calm when we come to this event. There's nervousness that is involved, and there is intimidation in speaking to a group of people like you. We're uncool and we're uncalm, and that's the way the Apostle Paul was.

Some historians have said that he was short, he was bald, he was bow-legged, he only had one eyebrow, and he probably had a black eye when he showed up in Corinth and was preaching in this way. He was not much to look at and not much to listen to. If you look at verse 3, he said, "*I was with you in weakness.*" Probably due to the fact that he'd been imprisoned in Philippi and driven out of Thessalonica and Berea, and had been basically ignored in Athens and politely excused from there. He showed up in Corinth a run-down figure, indeed, both emotionally, physically, spiritually.

But then, he says also, notice, that "*I was with you...in fear and much trembling.*" If we took the time to track down these two descriptors in Paul's writings, he oftentimes puts them together and used them to describe a sense of awe and a sense of intimidation and righteous fear, if you will, before some weighty issue, before some weighty task. No doubt here in Corinth, it had to do with the burden of the gospel taking root in this unpromising place. Not a lot of positive response here in Corinth.

If we went back to Acts 18, in the Acts account when Paul came to Corinth, there was a lot of push-back and resistance. And in fact, Paul was fearful, and he was ready to throw in the towel. He was ready to quit. Jesus had to speak to him in a dream and say, "Stay in the game. You stay with it. I've got a lot of people here. Keep preaching the gospel." That's some serious intimidation for a guy like the Apostle Paul. I mean, you're a big deal when your middle name is "the": Paul the Apostle. And he's intimidated. He is scared. And he is ready to quit.

And this is how he came to Corinth. And the content that he had wasn't much better. If you look there in verse 4, he says, "My speech and my message." These two words together describe both his word choice as well as his delivery, how he presented these words. And he said they were not in plausible words of wisdom, indicating that by Corinthian standards and the standards of the culture of the day, he wasn't very enticing and he wasn't very persuasive.

So, you've got weakness, you've got fear and trembling, you've got words and delivery that are not very enticing and persuasive. And yet, Paul said, "I have one thing, and this one thing I would trade everything else to have." Do you see it at the end of verse 4? He said, "But my preaching was in demonstration of the Spirit and power." You see, Paul's weakness and his fear and his trembling and the fact that his words and his delivery weren't very enticing and persuasive created a perfect storm through which the Apostle Paul manifested the mighty hand of God. And he said, "You give me that. I'll sacrifice everything else." And

do you know why he said that? Because he understood that this is the way God intended for it to be.

Now, those of you who were here last weekend readily connect this from where we were in 1 Corinthians 1. Do you remember what he said about the kinds of people God saves, and the ways that God works? Just look back at 1 Corinthians 1. Look at verse 26 and following. Do you remember this? *"For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were..."* And just notice the descriptors. *"...wise..."* But notice what he says, *"...according to worldly standards."*

And all the way through this, these next few verses, you will see that: *"In the world..."* *"In the world..."* *"In the world..."* He's describing how the world views the kinds of people that God saves. He says, *"Not many of you were wise...not many of you were powerful, not many were of noble birth."* And then in verses 27-28, *"But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not..."* I mean, how better could you describe a group of people that the world would look at and say, "Losers!" This is what Paul says God has chosen to do.

And when you come to verses 3 and 4 in 1 Corinthians 2, Paul is saying, "I preached in keeping with that economy. I came to you in keeping with the economy of the way that God works." Why? Because of verse 29 in 1 Corinthians 1. Do you remember it? *"So that no human being might boast in the presence of God."* We talked about that last week. We talked about it the first week; Pastor David introduced us to this book. God has rigged this whole deal for that reason. He has chosen to use weak and lowly things, weak and lowly people.

He's chosen a foolish message of a guy dying on the cross to be the way people get saved; this foolish event called preaching that makes absolutely no sense in our culture and chosen people like us to engage in it for one reason, and that is so when He releases His supernatural power, and He puts your marriage back together and heals your family, restores your soul, saves you, lifts you out of the grave into life, brings you from darkness into light--when supernatural, otherworldly stuff like that happens, there's not a chance in the world that anybody would look and say, "Wow, look what that person did for themselves. Wow, look what that preacher did. Wow, look what that church did. Look what that program did." No chance. The only conclusion people could draw is, "Only God could do that; only God could do that."

And Paul said, "That is what I desired in coming to you. So I preached gladly in weakness, fear and trembling, and I intentionally chose not to use enticing and persuasive words by the standards of this world so that my preaching would be a demonstration of God's Spirit and God's power." Paul says, "I will sacrifice everything to have that."

You see, Paul understood that this was God's economy. And get this, church: It is a weird economy. It is a twisted economy when measured against, compared against the economy of the world. But this is the way God has been operating since the beginning of time. It wasn't that God looked at the economy of the world, the value system of the world, and said, "Well you know what? I'm just going to do something different, so I'm going to change everything around." This is the way God has been operating. The world has perverted the economy, so when people look at God's economy—His way of working—it seems to make no sense.

Have you ever thought about how weird some of the stuff Jesus said is in comparison to the economy of the world? I mean He said...Think about it. "If you want to be first, you've got to be last. If you want to be a leader, you've got to be a servant. If you want to be exalted, you have to be humbled." That's just weird. "If you want to gain your life, you've got to lose your life." That's messed up. That is just twisted compared to the way the world sees things.

Think about it through history, though. This is the way He's always operated. This is the way He chose David, the king of Israel, through whom Messiah would come. Do you remember after Saul disqualified himself? Samuel is out looking for a new king. He shows up at Jesse's house. He's got twelve sons, and so they do the beauty pageant. They just run them through, one-by-one. God just checks them off and says no. Samuel's a little confused, so God speaks to him, and this is what He says: "*But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart'*" (1 Samuel 16:7). "Go out there and get the shepherd boy tending the sheep." That's messed up.

Ladies, what about the economy in which God considers His favor on you? Completely opposite of what the world says. In Proverbs 31:30a, it says, "*Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain...*" That's messed up in the eyes of the world. It's not what the billboards say. It is not what the advertisements say. It's not what pornography says. It is not what the products that are sold say. They say, "Charm is everything." They say, "Beauty is everything. Do everything you can to get it." But God says it's deceitful, it's vain. "*...but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised*" (Proverbs 31:30b). That's messed up. That's twisted in the eyes of the world.

He's done it with politicians. Zerubbabel was intimidated, coming back into the Promised Land with the children of Israel after their exile. He had the responsibility of leading them to rebuild the temple and restore Israel as the people of God in the homeland. And he was scared; he wanted to quit. So God speaks to him through the prophet Zechariah, and He says this: "*...This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts*" (Zechariah 4:6). That's messed up with regard to leaders in that kind of position, at least through the lens of our world.

Paul understood this. He got this. So he talked a lot about it. He talked about us and our being trusted with the gospel. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, he says that "*...we have this treasure...*" He's speaking about the gospel, this most prized possession. "*...we have this treasure in jars of clay...*" "Earthen vessels" in some translations. Clay pots that break if you drop them. They bust. Why would anybody think about taking the most prized treasure and possession in all of the universe and putting it in a jar of clay? Why did God do that? Paul says, "*To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*" That's messed up. It's twisted.

And then 2 Corinthians 12, when he comes to the end of this book, and he's talking about that thorn in the flesh deal, the thing in his life which he cried out to God three times that He would take it away from him. And this is the way Jesus answered him: "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness*" (2 Corinthians 12:9a). Underline that; underscore that. Mark it down. That is a summary of the twisted economy of God. This is it. His strength, His power manifested through our weakness. Why? So that, when all is said and done, His power is shown. Everybody just glorifies God, and they don't glorify us.

So what does Paul say? He says, *"Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities."* Why? *"For when I am weak, then I am strong"* (2 Corinthians 12:9b). Paul says, "If that's the secret to the power of God, then bring it on."

Would you just pause to think about for a minute, church, tonight? How little sense that makes in the eyes of this world that teaches us when you're in weakness and you're in difficult circumstances, you do everything you can to get out of it. Now, don't hear me wrong. I'm not saying the Bible teaches us to go looking for persecution, to go looking for weakness, to go looking for hardship. But neither does it tell us that, when we find ourselves in those positions, the first thing we do is everything we can to remove those circumstances from us. If this is true and this is the economy of God and this is the reason for the economy of God, why would we buy into what the world says and do everything we can to avoid weakness and avoid persecution and avoid hardship and avoid difficulty?

The Apostle Paul said, "I preached to you in the way that was consistent with the economy of God." So what do we do with that? How do we do it? Well, let me just put these things on the table as starters: Number one, consider God's "twisted" economy when you feel weak. When you find yourself feeling weak—we as preachers, all of us as the people of God—our weakest points, difficult circumstances, listen, we might just be at that point in the greatest and most potent position we will ever find ourselves in to experience the power of God. The starting point is just to remember this twisted economy. Keep it on our radar. When you find yourself in the valley, stop at that point and remember this: It is in situations like that that God has shown Himself strongest to His people in days gone by.

Secondly, celebrate the weaknesses of those who preach to you. Where we apply this, and the way that Paul is right here to this preaching event, do you know what this demands? It demands that we have to view preaching talent and giftedness differently. We can't measure effectiveness in preaching by smooth oratory or dynamic personality or skillful delivery or attractive appearance or the most theological education. That's the kind of ways the world measures stuff, the kind of things that they look at. And maybe those who speak in public—that's what they would measure public speakers with.

This text demands that we approach this preaching event differently, and we celebrate human weakness in our preachers, instead of criticizing those weak things and their levels of giftedness that they can't do anything about. Instead of comparing them, that we look and say, "Listen. In God's economy these are the kinds of things where He shows Himself the strongest."

Number three: Come to the message of the cross with your weaknesses. If preaching and preaching of the cross brings to bear the person and work of Christ on our fleshly and worldly desires that we talked about last week, then, surely, surely, it's intended to be brought to bear on our weaknesses and our failures and our shortcomings. One of the ways that we manifest this as a family of faith is we bring those things to the preaching event every week, and we let the cross be brought to bear on them and all of its implications—all of the forgiveness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who died on that cross—brought to bear on our failures and our sin every time the message of the cross is preached.

Every time it is preached, we bring our inadequacies, our limited giftedness, our feeling, sometimes, that we don't measure up, and we bring them and allow the message of the

cross to be brought to bear on them, and we walk away and we understand that it is in those weaknesses and abilities, oftentimes, that God shows Himself the strongest.

And then sometimes—I know this is not very often, we pray not from a prideful standpoint anyway—sometimes when we’re not seeing those things in our life, it’s not that we don’t have sin, but we’re not seeing those glaring things in our lives and things are pretty good. Our marriage is okay, and we like our job and everything is kind of going pretty good, in a good flow—this reality causes us to ask the question, “Should we be desiring that God do something in our life to manifest our weakness in order that His power might be shown strong through us?”

In other words, is this something that we would desire God to do in our life? Is the power of God, the blessing of God, the anointing of God, the supernatural infusion of God’s Spirit into our lives, into our church—is it of great enough value for us that we would say to Him, “God, do whatever you have to do to bring us to a point of desperation and weakness so that your power would be manifested”? Art Azurdia said this, and let me just warn you, this quote will mess you up if you’re not careful. He said, “It is highly unlikely that any man will ever know the Spirit’s power until he is willing to confess before God, ‘If you must hurt me to make me a suitable channel of your power, then do so.’”

Could you pray that prayer? Would you be willing to pray a prayer like that? If this is true, if this messed-up, twisted economy is really the way that God has chosen to work, would it be of such great value in your life and would it be of such great value in our church tonight that we would say, “God, if the only way that you can make us a channel of that power is to hurt us, then do that”? That is a dangerous prayer, but beloved, God desires so much to manifest His power in your life, and to manifest His power in our preachers, to manifest His power in our worship and in our disciple-making and our advancement of the gospel to the nations, that we must be a people who said, “We want whatever it takes, God, for you to carry out your economy in us.”

### **Let’s respond to the gospel message with obedient lives.**

Number six on the list of challenges: Let’s respond to the gospel message with obedient lives. We’ll not spend a ton of time here, because we’ve kind of introduced this last week. But I want you to notice in verse 5 this purpose clause. “*So that,*” Paul says. And that purpose clause really encompasses all of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, everything he said up to this point about this economy of God and what He has chosen to do, what He’s doing, is to this end. And so here it is: “*So that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*”

Suffice it to say right now that Paul implies—no, he assumes—that the message of the cross and the preaching of that message always demand a response. You can’t be neutral about this. If, in fact, this is God’s Word, and if, in fact, in our preaching, we handle God’s Word with integrity and present it as the message from God, not just about God, then it can’t leave us the same. We can’t, we can’t be passive about it. We can’t treat it as an academic exercise. Verse 5 in this text implies and assumes that the Word of God always demands a response.

So, I want to encourage you; I want to challenge you to do that this way. Number one: Respond to God’s Word with your obedience. Every week, every week, offer some positive response. It may not be some physical expression in this room, but when you go home, adjust your life accordingly because God has spoken. John MacArthur, talking about his study habits and practices in preparing to preach, said, “I consider it a wasted day if I

haven't learned something new from God's Word." And that's a noble goal for every one of us.

But I wonder if we could adapt that tonight. Would we be willing to say, as a people of faith known as Brook Hills, "We count it a wasted week when the Word of God hasn't changed our lives in some way"? Would we say together, "We count it a wasted sermon if it has not brought the crucified Christ to bear on my life in such a way that it has brought about some kind of change"? We really can't afford to look at the Word of God and the preaching of the Word of God any other way. So see how it comes to bear and crucifies your flesh every week. Go home. Put it into practice. Tell somebody about the commitment you're making for accountability.

So respond to God's Word with your obedience, but don't miss this. We can't separate the second one. Rely on God's power for your obedience. Do you ever find yourself sitting in here—sometimes when Pastor David is preaching and he's challenging us from God's Word—you're listening to the call of disciple-making or to not live according to the economy of this world, to sacrifice the American Dream for the sake of the advancement of the gospel, or maybe some challenge to slay some besetting sin in your life, and be done with that and repent of that. Do you ever find yourself listening to challenges like that and thinking to yourself, "I don't think I can do that"? "I don't think I can do that in my life. I don't think I can love my wife like he's talking about Christ loved the church. I don't think I can shepherd my family that way. I don't think I can be patient and generous. I don't think I can stop looking at pornography. I don't think I can do that."

Do you ever find yourself saying that? Can I just give you some good news? If you ever find yourself saying that when you hear the Word of God preached, you're in a good, good place. You're in a right place. You know why? Because we can't! We can't do it. We can't just go out and say, "Okay, that's what the preacher said. That's what I'm going to do." We ought to feel the rub of what our flesh is capable of doing and the lofty things that the Word of God calls us to. Does that give us an excuse not to see any life change? No. Why? Because the point is, in verse 5, that we would put our faith not in the wisdom of men but in what? What does it say? The power of God. Do you see it? That's what Paul said.

This is the end game. This is where we're headed with this, that we would come to this place that it would be so weighty, it would be so important, it would be so otherworldly that we would say, "We can't do that. But God, in the cross of Christ, has provided everything necessary for our lives to be aligned with His will, and so I'm trusting in His power, His ability, and not my own." And that's how we respond to this deal. That's what we do. We say, "I trust God's power—not in that preacher, not in this church, not in a program, not even in a sermon that was delivered. I'm trusting in the power of God that was exalted in the message of Christ and the cross." Rely on God's power for your obedience.

### **Let's magnify the gospel's power, not the gifted preacher's.**

Then, we come to number seven: Let's magnify the gospel's power, not the gifted preacher's. I want you to note something. I want you to mark this down. It's not a fill-in-the-blank but don't miss this. People who listen to sermons will put their faith in whatever they consider most important in the preaching event. Let me say it again. People who listen to sermons will put their faith in whatever they consider to be most important in the preaching event.

So you do the math on that deal. If we consider the preacher to be most important, then that's where our trust and our confidence will be. If we consider the presentation and the

way we set the stage up and the room that we have it in and the tools that we have, or even the style of delivery that a preacher has—if those are the things that we consider to be most important, then that’s what we’ll put our confidence in. But if we consider most important in the preaching event the message of the cross, and we put our trust in that, then listen to me, beloved. That is a lasting faith. That is a sustaining faith, whereas faith in all of those other things is a faith that is not authentic; it is not real. It will ultimately be disappointed, and it will peter out and never ever last.

That’s what Paul’s saying. *“So that,”* verse 5, *“your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”* He’s taking this really specifically all the way back to 1 Corinthians 1 and verses 11 and 12. Do you remember? Where he said in verse 11, *“For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.”* And then he says, *“What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’”*

Now listen to me very carefully. Let me tell you what’s behind that. The Corinthians followed orators and philosophers the same way we follow movie stars and rock stars. It was their entertainment. They didn’t have nice theaters to go to and watch a movie screen or concert halls with all the technology we do. They certainly didn’t have podcasts and iPads and iPods and mp3 players to listen to. They didn’t have all that. So their entertainment was they went and listened to great orators, guys that could speak well with flowery language and were very enticing and persuasive.

And they also followed around guys that just were philosophers. There was a group called the Sophists, and they were just travelling philosophers. And people would go and they would attach themselves to them for entertainment purposes and listen for the way that they just waxed eloquently on the ways of the world. This was their entertainment. So put that together now with the rise of the Christian church, and the church begins to surface in Corinth, and the church has its own version of high-profile figures. It has its own philosophers, their theologians. It has its own orators; they’re called preachers.

And the most natural thing in the world—process this—is to take the economy with which we view those high-profile figures in the secular world and bring them into the church, is it not? And that’s exactly what the Corinthians had done. I mean, you look at that list in verse 12 in 1 Corinthians 1. Those guys didn’t have different theologies. Paul, Jesus, Peter, Apollos—they were on the same page theologically. They didn’t have different messages. They were all preaching the message of the cross.

But I guarantee you what they did have was they had different personalities, different styles, different approaches in the way that they spoke language, in the way that they delivered their messages. And guess what happened? Christian people began to view them the same way that they viewed the entertainers in the secular world. And they began to approach them the same way. And so the Christian church did what? It formed its own version of groupies and fan clubs. And they began to attach themselves to these different preachers, not because of different theologies or different messages, but because of different personalities, styles and deliveries.

And that’s why Paul said in verse 1 of 1 Corinthians 2, “When I came to you, I was intentionally trying not to do things that would feed into that. I didn’t take the way my message was formed in my mind, the way it was presented, speech and wisdom, and I didn’t do that in a lofty way, a way that rose above the testimony of God.” Paul understood that it is possible for a personality or a delivery style or a dynamism or anything like that

that a preacher has—ever how sincere he might be—it is possible sometimes for that to rise above and become a distraction to the message of the cross. And Paul says, “I was doing everything I could to avoid that.”

James Spurgeon, who was the grandfather of Charles Spurgeon, the famed British pastor known as the “Prince of Preachers”, was also a pastor and one equally committed to not elevating the preacher above the message. It had been announced on one occasion that they younger Spurgeon, who was already widely known in that day, was going to be preaching at a church in Suffolk. And his grandfather was there, but Charles Spurgeon, the younger Spurgeon, was late in arriving.

So his grandfather started the service, and he even started the sermon because Charles wasn't there yet. So he chose as his text Ephesians 2: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith...*” He was into it a little while when, all of a sudden, a disturbance at the back door made it evident that the younger, prestigious Spurgeon had arrived. So in the middle of his sermon, the elder Spurgeon looked at the congregation, and he said, “Here comes my grandson. He can preach the gospel better than I can.” But then in mid-sentence, he turned and looked at his grandson who was being escorted down the aisle and said, “But you can't preach a better gospel, can you, Charles?”

Beloved, this is what we have to get. Listen to this. Come in here real close. The gospel does not increase in effectiveness and quality depending upon the giftedness of the preacher. Let me say it again. The gospel does not increase in effectiveness and quality depending upon the giftedness of the preacher. This is why the message of the cross must be featured and remain constant. One preacher may be able to preach better than another, but he will never be able to preach a better gospel.

Do you know what the ultimate tragedy is of not making sure that that message features? The ultimate tragedy is where people put their faith. That's what verse 5 is talking about. Doing all of this, Paul said, “...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” Because, you see, people are going to have a tendency to put their faith in whatever features in the preaching event.

And this can come from an audience; it can come from a preacher. We, as preachers, can do things that cause other things besides the message to rise above the message, and that's what we put forward to feature before the people. And that will lure the faith of many to be in a place that won't last. But it can also happen with congregations who impress that upon preachers, and in their expectations and what they value, they begin to elevate things above the message of the cross as well, and, consequently, that's what they put their confidence in. That is the tragedy of not yielding ourselves in our weakness to the message of the cross and letting it be featured.

There's an elephant in this room tonight that we can't ignore, and it is one that demands that we at The Church at Brook Hills hear the Word of the Lord from this text in a special way. Because God has chosen in His sovereignty to place His hand of favor on our senior pastor and give him a platform and a voice that is very wide, very broad and even world-impacting. And, I tell you, that's especially curious to some of us who knew him before he was a well-known figure. It has been said that behind every successful man is a surprised woman, and Heather might give testimony to that tonight. You know that I'm joking, because I join with you in rejoicing in the blessing of God and the way that He has chosen to use our pastor, David Platt, in a broad way.

But listen, with that stewardship comes incredible responsibility on his part and on our part. And we need to talk about that for just a few minutes before we go home tonight. So I'm going to invite the elephant in the room to join me here on the platform, and we're going to talk about this for a little bit, and, in so doing, just put forth seven responsibilities that we have together. They're listed in your Worship Guide; you don't have to fill in any blanks. We just want to kind of talk through these things for a little bit and think about this incredible responsibility.

David, I would just start with this one at the top of the list, and that is that we've got to resist as a people of faith this "Christian rock star" culture. John Piper was interviewed a number of years ago by a guy who was referencing, what he described as a "young rising star in evangelicalism," and Piper confessed that he didn't know the guy. So when this interviewer was telling him about him, he used the term, "He's kind of a rock star in Christian preaching today." Piper responded with a very troubled, distressed look on his face, and he said, "Let's not be the people who use that terminology."

And I agree with that. I think that's something that we do have to push back on, but I also know that not every preacher seeks that. This text is evident of that, really. You stop and think about the fact that Jesus and Paul and Apollos and Peter—these weren't guys that were setting out to be rock stars. These are things that the church had impressed upon them and elevated them to. So there's this incredible responsibility, I know, on our people's part, as well as what you feel, and I just want to begin by saying thank you for the way that you've navigated that.

I have the privilege of knowing you online and in the public sector, as well as offline, and I know this is something that you've not only resisted personally, but you're uncomfortable with. There are just so many things that have blessings to us, and they're not necessarily have-to's, but just evidences that this is something that you really push back in. Just thinking about the royalties of your books that go to advancing the gospel and not to benefit you personally. And somebody goes in your office—it's not lined with pictures of you with high-profile figures. You've been with those, Presidents of the United States and other individuals. But what's on your wall are pictures of hungry kids and unreached people groups. And thanks for helping us navigate that tension. What a blessing.

**David Platt:** This is really uncomfortable, man.

**Jim Shaddix:** And I'm enjoying it.

**David Platt:** Yeah good. So, you know, the thing is I think this "Christian rock star" culture can really cut dangerously both ways. It can be dangerous, I think, for people; it can also be dangerous for preachers, for a pastor. The praise of man can really be poison for the soul, especially when we start to crave it and enjoy it. And then you find yourself—there's criticism that comes with the rock star culture as well, and you start to go up and down, and you lose sight of the power of the message and you start to....

I'm so thankful for a point early on in my ministry when I was preaching in East Tennessee, at old-fashioned Sunday-through-Wednesday revival meetings. And during the day, they asked me to go and speak at a high school to a group of teenagers. They told me, "This is a public school, so you can't use the Bible. So speak to the teenagers and draw them in and invite them to come that night to the service."

So I did, and it was the most miserable 25 minutes of my life, trying to grab the attention of high schoolers and trying to give a speech. I know some guys can do this and that's great, but I just fell flat on my face. You talk about an uncool factor. I mean, I was way low. Talk about bow-legged. I mean, you can drive a Mac truck in between these knees. My insufficiency was just on display at every turn.

And I remember walking away just thinking, I'd been sweating through that whole 25 minutes and thought I was miserable, and then it was like the Lord was saying as clearly as possible, "Apart from my Word, you will fall flat on your face. You have nothing to bring to the table apart from that." So, I want that to be central. At the same time, when I think about this stuff, people are like, "Well, what should I do? Should I preach bad sermons? Should I write books that nobody will read except for me? What do I do with that?"

**Jim Shaddix:** And that, I think, needs to bring us to the second one, because when we look at that, and we say, "Okay, are we supposed to develop some type of martyr syndrome and suppress that?" And even for us as a church, is that something we would not want? And the answer to that is "no." In fact, just as it's said there on your Worship Guide, this is something that we should celebrate, because of the larger, the broader kingdom impact.

And I think that's one of the things we have to realize. God puts His hand of favor on a guy in a special way, and He's using him to announce the gospel broadly, and here we are. We sit as a people that know that the reason we're on the planet is to make as many disciples as we possibly can. Do the math on that deal. What does that mean? It ought to mean that we would celebrate that. We would want that larger Kingdom impact, and we would rejoice in that, as we of course do.

But I think it's important at this point for us to know, and we recognize this so clearly, that you're a pastor and you're our pastor. You're the pastor of The Church at Brook Hills, and it has been evident that you have understood that it is the shepherding of this body right here through which God has given you much of that broader platform. And that's such a treasure. It's a stewardship for us; it brings great responsibility.

But I can remember being with you in China right as you were assuming the responsibility of the pastor here, and even leading up to that as you were praying through it and just asking the question, "Can I have a greater impact for disciple-making as a seminary professor or as a pastor of a local church?" And God brought you to the place of reminder that this is frontlines ministry, this is the center of the Christian universe, and there's no better way than to mobilize a congregation. How exciting it's been to see that fleshed out.

But it does. It brings responsibility on our part as a people of faith when we do have a pastor that God is using like that. It gives us the responsibility of not demanding that you're here all of the time and spend all of your time in your office or with us. But, instead, for us to gladly and joyfully share you abroad. That is a really cool thing for us.

**David Platt:** This is what I love most about this whole picture, because I remember sitting there in an underground location and just talking with you, praying with you about what the Lord was doing in leading me here to pastor. That's what I love—that any of this broader-Kingdom impact or influence is totally based on what God by His grace is doing in this local church and in my life as pastor in this local church.

You know, if you've been around here for very long, *Radical* was nothing you needed to read or new to you. It's something you lived through. You've put up with in some ways. And

*Follow Me*—there’s nothing new in that. The things that I’ve written or things that are happening in a broader picture are totally based on God’s grace in this local church. And I love shepherding the local church and all this other stuff—just to be the platform through which this can encourage other churches.

I even had a couple people ask us today, “Is this you all preparing for David to leave?” No, not at all! You know, I wouldn’t guarantee a thing...I hope not. You know, I wouldn’t guarantee anything. God has a blank check in all of our lives, right? The Lord could lead us to move overseas tomorrow, which we would gladly obey if He did, but I’d love to pastor this church for thirty, forty years if the Lord gives me that, and just shepherd this local church, and in the process, to encourage other local churches.

That’s the whole reason why we have the resource ministry, Radical.net. The whole picture there is so we can take what God’s doing here and serve other local churches. A week from now in this worship gathering—next Sunday night—we’ll have about a hundred pastors and church leaders who are in here who—it’s the first time we’ve done this, an event called “Radical Intensive,” where we capped it at a hundred, but it’s representing close to forty different churches—will be here for our worship gathering Sunday night, and then Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. And basically, we’re going to gather together; they’ll gather together with our pastors to talk about how we can mobilize local churches for the accomplishment of the Great Commission.

This is an opportunity that we have that I hope is celebrated. But in the process—if I can jump into your third point—that we affirm faithful pastors of local churches. So that’s what we want to do. I think that’s one of the dangers that comes in a whole podcast picture, so there are many more people who listen to sermons from here during the week on podcast than there are even sitting in this room on a Sunday. And I think there’s a danger—and I would speak even here to the ambiguous podcast listener out there who, I hope, is being nourished with the Word, but not to look at me as pastor or Jim as pastor, whoever’s preaching as pastor.

I want to stand up and give a standing ovation to pastors of local churches who are shepherding the people of God, and to say this is the people that the Lord’s entrusted to my care, The Church at Brook Hills, and to the care of other pastors here. And He’s entrusted others to the care of pastors in their local churches. And we want to affirm at every level pastors of local churches in a way that I think can get lost in this whole picture.

**Jim Shaddix:** Yeah, and you’ve identified the huge danger. It’s one of those points that we do have to push back against. I think for us here at Brook Hills who may listen to other preachers as well, other high-profile preachers that God may be using in a broad way, but also those that would maybe be listening by podcast who follow you and your teaching—the danger comes when we begin to compare those higher-profile preachers with the pastor of our local church who is preaching the gospel faithfully, shepherding the congregation. He’s preaching the same message. He may not have the same platform and/or he may not have the same degree of giftedness in there, but he’s preaching this message of the gospel, and how it can undermine the ministry of the local church and our support of the pastors in our churches if we compare those guys.

And I think one of the things that that leads us to is the next thing on the list, is that we constantly are crediting the message and not the messenger. I mean, when God does this other-worldly stuff in our lives—He heals our marriages, He puts our homes back together, restores our lives, He saves us, He does all that—that we’re not a people who say, “Well,

the pastor did this. Pastor Jim said this, or Pastor David did this for me, or Pastor Matt put my life back together, changed my life." But instead, we're a people that say, "This is what the Bible says, and this is the truth that I learned, and this is what the gospel did in my life." Even with those things with regard to rhetoric, we can do stuff—the words that we use—where we attribute the message. And sometimes, we need to be reminded about making sure we get those in the right order.

I remember Alex Haley, the famed author of *Roots*, had a picture in his office of a turtle sitting on a fencepost. And he said it was there to remind him of a lesson that he had learned earlier in his life, and that is that if you see a turtle on a fencepost, you know he had some help. And Haley said, "Any time I begin to think, 'Wow, look at what I've done; look at these books I've written and the fame that I've got,' I stop and remember that I'm just a turtle on a fencepost, and that I've had some help getting up there." And we always want to credit that help.

So I've successfully and affectionately referred to you as an elephant, and now a turtle on a fencepost. David, how do we flesh this out at Brook Hills? How do these things play out?

**David Platt:** I think there are things that we want to do intentionally as a church to guard ourselves against this "I follow Paul, I follow Apollos, I follow Cephas" kind of culture that can develop. So that's where these next two come in. One, to value the biblical model of teaching teams. We talk all the time around here about having a plurality of elders, pastors. We have thirty elders, and some are on staff, some are not on staff, and they share, so it's not one person counseling, one person doing all the weddings, one person doing all the funerals, one person doing this or that, one person everybody's got to meet with, that sort of thing. Instead, you've got a plurality of elders and pastors who are shepherding this body.

And that transfers over into teaching. I think it is a very healthy thing, I think we see a biblical model of this, and it's a healthy thing for us to make sure we guard against dependence on a personality to have a plurality of pastors who are teaching us through the Word. So, that's why there are Sundays like this one—well, this is kind of a little...you brought me up here a little bit—but normally, like last week when Jim was teaching, I'm here. Somebody came up to me afterwards and said, "I was visiting, and I thought you were the pastor. Why weren't you teaching?" And I said, "Ah, the key word that you got wrong in that was "the". I'm not "the" pastor. I'm a pastor in this church."

And certainly, there are primary leadership responsibilities that I sense and feel before the Lord and before this church. At the same time, I think it's a very healthy thing for us to walk through the Word under the leadership of multiple pastors, and God has obviously gifted us with multiple pastors who can serve us with the Word well, I mean like mentoring and preaching. You've got JV and Varsity. And then Matt....

**Jim Shaddix:** Your time is over.

**David Platt:** Ha, I don't want to hear it! So Matt Mason... And even last summer, some of you were here last summer. Every week, we had a different pastor preach during the month of July. I was just so encouraged by the feedback. People would say, "Oh, this is so nourishing—from all these different brothers' lives." So we want to cultivate that, which is the next part: We come for the teaching, not the teacher, right? This is so important that we guard against this. If there's ever a thought when you come in and you pick up this Worship Guide, and it says at the top where the title of the sermon is, "David Platt's preaching," you start to think, "Ah, David. Why isn't he overseas somewhere?" Or, "Ah, Jim,

I was hoping David would be preaching." Or, "Oh Matt, I was hoping this person would be preaching." Whatever it might be.

As soon as that thought starts to come into your mind, let that be a check in your spirit, that your expectation—to go back to exactly what you said earlier, that we'll put our faith in what we say is most important in preaching—and let that be a check in your spirit that, "Wait. I'm coming for a teacher instead of teaching." Because you may not know who's preaching on a given Sunday here, but you will always know what's being preached on a given Sunday here. And this is what we've banked our life on: What's being preached, not who's preaching it. So value the teaching above the teacher; come for the teaching, not the teacher.

**Jim Shaddix:** Yeah, I think the whole conversation begs a really important question. It brings us to the place to ask the question, "Okay, so does that make it wrong for us to have a favorite preacher, or to have a particular guy who speaks into our hearts and God uses—to podcast his sermons, to read every book that he writes? Is it wrong for us to do that in order to magnify the message?" And I think the Apostle Paul would answer with a resounding "No!" It's not wrong. In fact, I think he would just say to us what this last responsibility is on your Worship Guide, and that is honor, love and obey faithful teachers.

As long as we're keeping this tension... I think we want to remember that Paul wanted the gospel to be received under the anointing of the Holy Spirit and to be presented in a creative and arresting way. He didn't want us to go out and—like we started talking about a minute ago—and dumb down our sermons and make them dull and that type of thing. He wanted it to go forth. He simply didn't want us to get things out of balance. I mean, the whole point of verse 5 is put your faith in the gospel and the message.

So if there's a guy that God's using to speak to our hearts, then it's a healthy thing as long as we remember that God is the one who has done this, and He's the one who has given this. The author of Hebrews tells us to remember our leaders, be mindful of them. The Apostle Paul would write to the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (and you can see this verse up on the screen), and he says to respect and esteem them very highly and love them because of their work. When Paul parted from the Ephesian elders in Acts 20, the text says that they wept. There was much weeping because they loved one another. There was an attachment to him, and there's nothing wrong with that.

And he would write later to the Ephesians: "*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...*" (Ephesians 4:11-12). So I think Paul would be a champion for a healthy relationship there, for us to have particular guys that speak into our lives in a particular way, but always to remember that God is the one that has elevated them. They are His gift and, therefore, we give thankfulness to Him.

David, I'm sure you probably know the rest of that story about Spurgeon. Maybe some of the folks here don't tonight. But you know, after his grandfather made that declaration, "You cannot preach a better gospel," W.Y. Fullerton writes the rest of the account in his biography:

Still pressing up the aisle, his grandson replied, "You can preach better than I can. Please go on." His grandfather refused, but he told him the text, explained that he had already shown the people the source and fountainhead of salvation, which is grace, and was now speaking of the channel of it

through faith. So the younger preacher took up the theme and advanced to the next point: But not of yourselves.

And he was setting forth the weakness and inability of human nature when his grandfather interrupted and said, "I know most about that." So for five minutes he discoursed, and then his grandson continued again. Having his grandfather's whispered commendation, "Good. Good," as he warmed to his subject, until at some special point the old man shouted, "Tell them that again, Charles!"

David, you're not Charles Spurgeon.

**David Platt:** True.

**Jim Shaddix:** The main point I want to make is that I'm certainly not your grandfather, but brother, and I do want you to know that I join with this congregation in telling you that we consider it a privilege that God has given us a stewardship in you. We thank God for you. We pray for you, and we want you to know that, as you are there, here, out there, wherever you are, you're going to hear our whispers saying, "Good. Good." And you're going to hear us saying every time you exalt Christ and Him crucified, "Tell them again, David. Tell them that again." We pray for you, and we love you, and I want to pray for you right now, and then I want you to pray for us as a congregation.

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