

Living and speaking the message of Jesus Christ is our greatest service

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Our fourth heart statement reads this way: *Living and speaking the message of Jesus Christ is our greatest service*. Our heart statements are our guiding beliefs as a church family; we've got 5 of them (if you've missed any of the first 3, go online and take a listen so you are caught up to speed). There are 3 components to this heart statement and I want to talk about all of them. There's the *living and speaking* part; what does that mean? How do you live and speak the message of Jesus? Our statement says living and speaking the message of Jesus is our *greatest service* to others. Why is that? Why is that the best way we can love and serve other people? That's a really important question. But first, let's make sure we know what the *message of Jesus Christ* really is?

There's a word you'll find in your NT; it's the word *gospel*. I usually don't get technical, but let's do so here briefly. Every time you see *gospel* in your English bibles it's a translation of this Greek word - **εὐαγγέλιον** or transliterated it looks like this: *euangelion*. There are two parts to this Greek word: "eu" in the Greek means good. The word "angelion" means message or declaration. So, as happens in many languages, when you sandwich this together you get a translation of *good message* or *good news*. That's what the gospel is. So, when you see verses like Romans 1:16 says, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel" just slide in the words "good news" - "For I am not ashamed of the good news." Or, let me read for you Mark 1:14-15, but I'm substituting the words "good news" where it says "gospel" (READ).

We're in a season of good news, aren't we? Korby and I have been spending money like politicians lately as we buy Christmas gifts for our boys. One of the reasons why Christmas is good news to our kids (and I'm guessing for you and your family, too) is because of the hope to open some pretty cool Christmas gifts. And as Christmas approaches, the anticipation and excitement keeps growing. All because of that good news.

Well, what's the good news of Jesus that would fill us with joy and excitement; that would actually compel us to tell others about Jesus? The Bible talks about the gospel in several kinds of ways. First of all, the gospel, the good news of Jesus, is a story. It's a narrative of what God has done for us; it includes the details of certain events and facts. We see this aspect of the gospel emphasized in 1 Cor. 15; let's read vs. 3-8 (READ).

Can you see how Paul is primarily covering the historical elements of the this good news? Jesus died for sins. He was so dead (can you be "so dead?") that he was buried and lay deceased for three days. But after those three days, Jesus Christ was resurrected from the dead. He was so alive (if you can be "so dead" I guess you can be "so alive") he appeared to various individuals and eventually he even appeared to large groups of his followers at the same time. All of this, Paul says, is in accordance with the scriptures; that means Jesus life, death and resurrection was promised and foretold by God in the OT; as amazing and

astonishing as these events were, they wouldn't surprise those who read and believe the scriptures of God. The gospel is the message, the information about what took place.

So, to begin, to believe in the gospel means you believe that these things happened as the scriptures state. The gospel is a true story. Our faith is not a fairy tale; it doesn't start with "once upon a time." Real people, real events in real time. One of the ways recounting the events and details of Jesus' story serves our faith is that it reminds us how great God's love truly is. Jesus really sacrificed and suffered for you and me as a genuine human being. He went hungry for you. He lost sleep for you. Many in his family and hometown disowned him (imagine Medford, Athens, Rib Lake, Abbotsford/Colby being embarrassed you are a local - that was Jesus). Jesus was spit on, beaten, bruised and killed for you. But you can also have confidence, joy and real hope because his broken and murdered body was given new life by the Spirit of God; he was raised from the dead and is still alive today proving that everything God said is 100% true. The gospel is first a true story of Jesus.

But the gospel is more than that. Turn to Romans 1 and read with me just one verse (READ vs. 16). The gospel, the good news of Jesus, is also *power*. Do you see how Paul says that in vs. 16? It is the the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. When a person embraces Jesus and all that he's done for him, when a person orients his life, shapes the direction of his acts and thoughts and words towards Jesus in faith, God grants a power to him. By God's grace, we receive a power that frees us from the guilt of our wrong doing; we receive a power to resist selfish, destructive tendencies; we receive a power that finds true meaning in all of our sufferings.

This element or aspect of the gospel speaks to the impact Jesus made in our world. Jesus' life, death and resurrection did something supernatural; it did something cosmic. It altered the course of history. But it did something incredibly personal, too. Not only is God renewing and restoring the created order and all that includes, but God is reaching out to every human being with his power of grace to forgive, to heal and to welcome. Jesus is the answer to what plagues nations and cultures, but he's also the answer to our own bruised and misguided heart.

If that's the case, I hope you can see why spreading this message is our *greatest service*? Service means the tangible expressions of our love to people. You may recall our second heart statement reads like this: Loving people is the greatest expression of our love for God. But love for people translates into acts of service, right? True, authentic love isn't merely well-wishes and warm thoughts. It's actual work and service to others for their good in the name of Jesus. So this fourth heart statement is saying that the best help, the greatest service, the best way we love people, is by sharing and revealing the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Think about it: if the benefits of the gospel are forgiveness of sin, power to overcome selfishness, and comfort and meaning in our sufferings (among other things), well, it doesn't get much better than that. Money, popularity, comfort, long life, good health can't cure our biggest problems, which are standing guilty before God in his court room, trapped in a life of destruction without

any meaning or purpose to our pain. So, serving people with the good news of Jesus, his message and the power of God that accompanies it, is absolutely the most loving thing we can offer people.

This heart statement reads in full this way:

- Since living and speaking the message of Jesus Christ is our greatest service
 - Our behaviors, attitudes and relationships, observed and unobserved, will proclaim and confirm the truth of the gospel.
 - This means we will evaluate every aspect of our lives to make sure it proclaims and confirms the gospel to those around us.

Look at the phrases I have underlined: *will proclaim and confirm the truth of the gospel... to make sure it proclaims and confirms the gospel to those around us*. Those phrases have to do with serving others. We serve one another within our church family and we serve those in our community when our lives proclaim and confirm that the gospel is true with the hopes, of course, that others believe in Jesus, too.

People who really believe in what they say are compelling. There's a great story of David Hume, the Scottish philosopher from the 18th century. Hume didn't believe in the gospel; he was a deist, which means he believed that there was a god, but he doesn't operate in the world any longer. George Whitefield, the puritan preacher, was a contemporary of his. David Hume woke one morning very early to go listen to George Whitefield preach. On his way someone stopped and said, "What are you doing up so early?" Hume said, "I'm going to hear George Whitefield preach." The man asked, "Well, you don't believe what George Whitefield says, do you?" Hume replied, "No, but he does."

Because the gospel life is radical, when we live by it and when we share it in faith, it's compelling. Peter says in 1 Peter 3 we should "always be[ing] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you." Wonder with me: why would someone ask? Someone would ask if they saw something compelling and wanted to learn more or understand better.

We do that by *living and speaking* the message of Jesus; let's spend the rest of our time talking about that. The first thing I want to bring up is the speaking part; our service to others must include telling them about Jesus. The scriptures state the necessity of using words to proclaim the gospel. Romans 10:17 says, "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ." People need to hear. And what do they need to hear? Words! The word of Christ. The message, the story, the explanation of God's work for us through Jesus. That's how faith is birthed in us. When the message of Jesus is presented, the Holy Spirit takes that word and convicts our souls of its truthfulness and our need for God's help. That happens through words.

Another reason why we need to speak the message of Jesus is because actions can be so easily misunderstood or misinterpreted. Do you know what I mean? I can't tell you how many times I've gotten myself in trouble because I've interpreted my wife's actions or behavior the wrong way. You see, when all I see are actions I'm left with my own lens to interpret. It's the same thing when we live by the gospel. You might be beautifully living your life in conformity to Jesus, but if your neighbor or coworker really doesn't know why you do what you do, it's quite easy for them to interpret that their own way. For example, your words of kindness to someone are rightly motivated by God's kindness to you so you want to pass on grace the way you've received grace. But a coworker who believes the key to life is high self-esteem might think that's why you're saying the kind words that you say. Do you see what I'm getting at? Or consider the Christian ethic of sexuality. The scriptures tell us that sex is an absolutely awesome, beautiful and powerful activity that only finds its true purpose in a relationship of a man and woman married to each other. But, that's not how others in our world interpret our conviction. We must use words to help others truly understand what the truth of the gospel is.

But we can't just speak it, we must live it, too. Years ago I read William Farley's book called *Gospel-Powered Parenting*. One of the things Farley drives home so well is that how a mom and a dad behave, act and live make a powerful statement to the truthfulness of the gospel to their children. So, for example, why won't dad ever admit his mistakes, why won't he ever confess his sin, or ask for forgiveness if he says he believes Jesus died to forgive sinners? Dad is acting like he doesn't need forgiveness (which we know isn't true) or that Jesus won't forgive him. What's true? Does Jesus forgive or not? Do you see the impact of a life that confirms the truthfulness of the gospel?

This is the exact point John is making in 1 John 3:17 when he says, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" You're saying God's love is sacrificial; you're saying God's love meets our needs; but, here's a guy who has a need, but you won't make a sacrifice. Something isn't right!

We love to sing In *Christ Alone* around here. The 4th verse starts this way: No guilt in life, no fear in death - this is the pow'r of Christ in me. That's living the message of Jesus Christ. Because Jesus died to forgive me of all my sins, I won't walk around as if I'm a guilty man or woman anymore. I've been set free from my sin. Also, because of that, I don't have to be afraid of dying and meeting God. God will be glad to see me to invite me into his family; he's not going to be mad and angry at seeing me. So, I'm not going to live like dying is the worst thing that can happen to me. I don't have to be afraid anymore.

There are all kinds of ways we live our lives in conformity to the gospel.

- Because God reconciles all races together, I'm going to begin that work by living in harmony with people who are different than me.
- Because God is renewing his creation, I'm going to treat God's land, his water, his sky with the kind of care that he has.

- Because God welcomes strangers into his family, I'm going to welcome strangers into our church family.
- Because Jesus thought of others before he thought of himself, I'm going to think of others this Christmas before I think of myself.

This is living a life in conformity to the gospel. And when we do, it validates the truthfulness of the good news.

Look for ways, FBC, to serve others with the gospel. Speak it. Pray that God will give you opportunities to tell others about Jesus. Start with your story. In the plainest language you can find, just tell others how God demonstrated his love for you by sending Jesus to die for you while you were still a sinner. And live it, too. Pray that God would give you the right vision and then the power to live accordingly. And if we can do that together, I'm confident we'll keep making the impact God is calling for in the Taylor County area.

Key vs. Romans 1:16

Questions for the week

- How would you summarize the gospel of Jesus to someone who wanted to know? Thinking this through and being prepared makes speaking the message a lot easier.
- Are you ever tempted to think your greatest service is something different than sharing the gospel? When does that happen?
- What do you need God's help with so you live the gospel more faithfully? Confess that to a trusted friend and pray and seek the help you need.