

NEXT LEVEL PREACHING

Training & Coaching Guide



NEXT LEVEL PREACHING

with

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Speaker Bios



Tim has served in small, mid-sized and large churches, in rural, suburban and urban settings. He has a passion to see churches grow in vitality with an outward focus on sharing the good news of Jesus. Tim currently serves as Church Vitality Director at FEB Central and he lives in Hamilton with his wife Carol and three young-adult children.

Tim Strickland

Director of Church Vitality



Steve has served the Lord for over 30 years. He has experience in pastoring, denominational leadership, and leading para-church organizations. He has preached in a myriad of churches and audiences in the US and Canada for over 3 decades. He runs Adams&Co and works for FEB Central as a Church Vitality Catalyst.

Steve Adams

Adams&Co



Dustin serves as Lead Pastor of Springvale Church in Stouffville, ON. Currently pursuing a Doctorate in Practical Theology at McMaster Divinity College with a focus on spiritual formation in post-Christian contexts, Dustin also spent many years involved in church planting and revitalization in Montreal.

Dustin Boreland

Lead Pastor



Rick served for 30 years in pastoral ministry roles in churches in the FEB Central region. He is now the Leadership Advancement Director for FEB Central which supports our churches and ministry leaders in over 300 churches in Ontario and English speaking Quebec. Rick and his wife Jo live just outside of Barrie, ON.

Rick Buck

Leadership Advancement Director



Born in Northern Ireland to missionary parents, Jeremy spent his early life in Ethiopia. He earned his Master of Divinity and doctoral degrees in the USA, becoming a Teaching Pastor in the UK for 25 years. Now Lead Pastor of Grandview Church as of October 2025, he was former chair of Keswick Ministries.

Jeremy McQuoid

Lead Pastor of Grandview Baptist Church

Schedule

8:45am

Arrival and Coffee

9:00am

Welcome and Introduction

9:15am

Session 1 - Platform Presence and Communication - Tim Strickland

10:30am Break

10:45am

Session 2 - Preaching in the Power of the Spirit - Jeremy McQuoid

12:00pm Lunch

1:00pm

Session 3 - Evangelistic Preaching - Rick Buck

2:15pm Break

2:30pm

Session 4 - Preaching to the Next Generation - Dustin Boreland

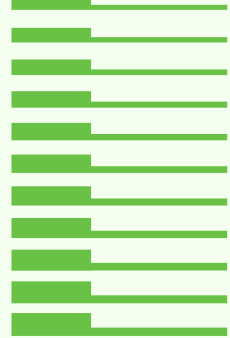
3:45pm Break

4:00pm

Session 5 - Preaching with the Listener in Mind - Steve Adams

5:15pm Closing Comments

5:00pm Finish



Session 1

Platform Presence and Communication

Principles

Tim Strickland

Platform Presence & Communication Principles

Next Level Preaching Network
Tim Strickland, Church Vitality Director, FEB Central

Teaching Overview

Introduction: Weeks & Years - How I Learned to Preach

“You’ve Got to Be Believed to be Heard” - Bert Decker

1. Basic Preaching Principles:

Be Interesting

Be Biblical

Be Spiritual

2. Practical Skills For Effective Speaking :

Connection

Be Warm

Make Eye Contact

Posture

A Forward Lean

A Full Charge

Move or Stand Still? Pitch

Voice Pace

Pause

Power (Volume)

Gestures

Go Big or Go Home!

Practice these skills.

Humbly receive feedback.

3. Flow: Conversation, Translation, Logic and Story

A Conversation with your Listeners

A Translation for your Listeners

Logic

Story

4. AA: Apologetics Always

Biblically True

Historically True

Logically True

Emotionally True

Spiritually True

5. Visuals & Handouts - Use Them.

*Visuals improve retention 62% - R. Blackwood, **Multi-Sensory Preaching***

Platform Presence and Communication Principles

Introduction: Weeks & Years: How I Learned How to Preach

- a. *I grew up on good preaching*
- RC Sproul, John Stott, Stephen Olford, Bill McRae, EV Hill, Alan Redpath, Charles Price
- b. *Learning to Preach at the Boys JIM Club Summer Camp*
- **If I had a Boy**
- c. *Advanced Preaching with Dr Nelson Annan*
- *Praying and Planning*
- d. **You've Got to be Believed to Be Heard** with Bert Decker
- *First, touch the listener's heart*
- e. *Preach the gospel every time in your sermon* - Mark Dever
- **Together for the Gospel**, Louisville, 2008
- f. **Leading Through Preaching and Communication** with Sid Buzzell
- *Leadership and preaching are closely connected.*
- g. *Weeks vs Years*
- *It's easier to learn how to be interesting than how to exegete.*
- *But too many preachers never learn...*

The Importance of Preaching Well - It matters!!

- *Preaching is a primary method that God uses to speak to us.*
- *81% of new converts and 91% of transfers rated the pastor's preaching as important in their decision to attend.¹*

1. Basic Principles:

Be Interesting

Be Biblical

Be Spiritual

Speak to your Listener's:

Heart

Mind

Spirit

Connect personally

Engage their heart

Communicate Truth

Engage their mind

Call for a Response

Engage their spirit

Pray and trust the Spirit of God to work in your listeners.

¹ Gary McIntosh, *Growing God's Church*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2016), 152.

2. Skills For Effective Speaking

Make a Connection

Start with a Smile

Make a personal connection with people right at the start.

- *Tell a joke, tell a funny/interesting story that happened to you.*
- *The goal is to touch the heart first, before the head.*

Make Eye Contact

- *Preaching is a conversation; look people in the eye.*
- *Find encouragers around the room and make eye contact.*

Posture

Forward Lean - preach in a ready position, pouring yourself out.

A Full Charge - Be ready to pour out energy - be enthusiastic.

Walk or Stand Still - I like to walk - it's more interesting and gets me out from behind the pulpit and close to people.

- *However, some preachers are better standing still - you need to find what's best for you.*

Voice

Pitch - Raise your voice pitch up and down. - Use pauses for emphasis. - Let people think about what you said.

Pace - I like to go at a good pace, but you need to vary it - It allows you to slow down to make a big point. - Watch out for too much content spoken too fast.

Power - Volume

- *Vary your volume - often a soft voice after a loud voice can emphasize a keypoint.*

Gestures

- *Go Big or Go Home.*
- *Timing: Match your gestures with your words.*
- *Un-learn distracting habits.*

Humour

As a preacher you are not a comedian, but it is helpful to have humour in your sermons. In Gary McIntosh's research, he found that 80% of new believers listed the pastor's sense of humour as a reason for choosing the church.

² Gary McIntosh, *Growing God's Church*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2016), 149.

3. Flow: Conversation, Journey, Translation, Clarity, Logic and Story

Preaching involves a conversation with your listeners.

- *You are taking the mona journey and having a conversation.*

Preaching involves a Translation to your Listeners

- *Speak Plainly-It is easy to use big words, but it is better to make the extra effort to use words that people understand.*

Preaching requires Logic

- *Your points should flow together in a logical flow, building on one another rather than being random, unconnected points.*

Preaching uses Story

- *People love and remember stories. If you can tell a story that illustrates your point it helps drive it home. Consider the example of Jesus' use of parables to teach spiritual principles.*

4. AA: Apologetics Always

Always to do apologetics to persuade people that what you are teaching is true.

3. Show that your points are:
- *Biblically True*
 - *Historically True*
 - *Logically True*
 - *Emotionally True*
 - *Spiritually True*

5. Visuals, Props, & Handouts = repetition through different mediums, and most people need repetition to remember.

- *Visuals increase retention by 62%.*
- *Interactive elements + Visuals increases retention by 75%.⁴*

6. Practice, Practice, Practice....Humble, Humble, Humble

Practice and Receive Feedback Humbly

- *The main way to get good at teaching and preaching is to practice and receive feedback.*
- *Record yourself and watch how you speak*
- *Ask your spouse or a good friend for honest feedback*
- *Preach a section of a sermon for a peer and ask for blunt feedback on pitch, gestures, flow, etc...Repeat the section again and again, integrating their feedback, until you improve to their satisfaction.*

³

⁴Tim Keller, *Center Church*. Rick Blackwood, *Multi-Sensory Preaching*.

Further Notes on Preaching

Introduction

“Spend time developing your speaking abilities and sermons. With more than four-fifths of church attendee’s noting the pastor’s preaching was important to their decision to attend (church transfers 91 percent and new converts 81%), this is the place where a pastor has the most control in improving a church’s ministry.”⁵ — Gary McIntosh

One of the biggest reasons someone remains in a church is because they like the preaching of the pastor.⁶ Out of all the areas of ministry, if you are the Lead Pastor you have the most control over preaching, because you are the one doing it and almost everyone in your church desires and expects you to take the time to do it well.

Three Simple Principles of Preaching:

i. Do Be Biblical

It is vital that your preaching be rooted in Scripture.

Expository Preaching

One of the great benefits of expository preaching is that forces you into the text. Many preachers have benefited from using the Big Idea Method of building a sermon, based on Haddon Robinson’s classic book, Biblical Preaching.⁷

Topical Preaching

There are times when topical preaching is helpful, but you must be careful not to substitute your own ideas and assumptions for Biblical principles. Topical preaching sounds easier but it can be a lot of work to do it well, as you need to do Systematic Theology on the topic, rather than just cherry-picking verses to support your point.

ii. Don’t be Boring “

*Boring preaching is a sin. It’s not simply a matter of one’s personality or gifting (or the lack thereof). To explain and expound and apply the Word of God in a monotone, lifeless, joyless manner is sin.”*⁸ —Sam Storms

A lot of preaching is boring because a lot of preachers do not spend time making their sermons interesting.

The good news is that it is a lot easier to learn to be interesting than it is to learn how to exegete accurately, and the payoff is significant.

⁵ Gary McIntosh, *Growing God’s Church*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2016), 152. Ibid., 148-152. Haddon

⁶ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, Second Edition ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001). Sam Storms,

⁷“Expository Exultation: Or, Why Boring Preaching is a Sin,” *Sam Storms*, August 22, 2014, accessed

⁸ 2016, <http://samstorms.com/enjoying-god-blog/post/expository-exultation:-or-why-boring-preaching-is-a-sin>.

Here are a few simple ways to be more interesting:

Good Presentation Skills

- *Varied Voice pitch and volume*
- *Eye Contact*
- *Pacing*
- *Gestures*
- *Conversational Style*

Sermons that are Logical

Sermons need to be logical and make sense. This seems like an obvious point, but it is amazing how many sermons feel like a disjointed group of biblically accurate points that do not seem to flow from one to the next.

A logical sermon takes people on a journey where they are interested to find out what comes next, because you are clearly taking them somewhere. Your points should flow and build on one another. If your points do not flow logically, you probably do not understand the text well enough. The Bible is logical and the points flow logically.⁹ Sometimes you will preach deductively, where you state the main point and support it with a few subpoints. Sometimes you preach inductively where you prove the main point three or four ways before you say it near the end. Some sermons are a blend of both deductive and inductive structure. But they all should be logical.

Humour

As a preacher you are not a comedian, but it is helpful to have humour in your sermons. In Gary McIntosh's research, he found that 80% of new believers listed the pastor's sense of humour as a reason for choosing the church.¹⁰

Stories and Illustrations

Stories and illustrations help people understand the point you are making, and also add colour and interest to the message. I find the best humour, stories, and illustrations come from every day life experiences that are familiar to your people. The Bible is about real life, and it is amazing how often you can find contemporary examples that illustrate the point of a Bible passage. The Bible is also filled with irony and humour, and if you do good exegesis you will pick up on the irony and humour and be able to share it as part of your message.

⁹ I think I may have heard John MacArthur speak about this principle of making sure your sermon is logical. I expect that many other preaching experts have made this point as well.

¹⁰ Gary McIntosh, *Growing God's Church*, (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2016), 149.

Watch yourself on video and be brutal in your self-assessment

Ask yourself, would I attend my church to listen to this? If you're feeling brave, ask your wife the same question.

Limit the sharing of your Exegesis

Younger preachers tend to share too much of their exegesis with the congregation.¹¹ I think they do it because spent so much time digging for it, find it fascinating, and assume everyone else will too. You need to pick and choose what points will need you to share some of your exegesis, and what points you will just state, knowing you did the exegesis, but not showing it all to the congregation.

Try cutting 5-10min out of your sermon.

It's easier to go long than it is to stay short. Try cutting 5-10min out of your sermon. You might be amazed how the sermon has the same or more impact in less time.

Practice all of the above - you will get better!

I think of Billy Graham practicing his preaching out in nature.¹² He was one of the great preachers of the last century, in no small part because he worked hard at his craft.

iii. Do be Spiritual

People don't just need information, they need to sense the voice of God and the hand of God in your preaching. You can't manufacture this, but you can be passionate about it, pray over your sermon, and preach like it matters, and trust God to give spiritual results.

¹¹ I received this feedback on my own preaching in my earlier ministry years.

¹² Billy Graham, *Just as I Am*, (New York, Harper Collins, 1997), 49.

Notes



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Session 2

Preaching in the Power of the Spirit

Jeremy McQuoid

Preaching in the Power of the Spirit

Jeremy McQuoid, Lead Pastor of Grandview Baptist

I. Contrasting stories of Spirit-empowered preachers

- a. Evan Roberts in Wales, 1904 revival
 - i. Untrained son of a miner
 - ii. 1 year of unusually powerful Gospel preaching
- b. Jonathan Edwards in New England, 1741 revival
 - i. Scholarly, awkward pulpiter
 - ii. Preacher of the Great Awakening
- c. Common thread – a hunger for God

II. Spirit-empowered preaching does not negate the need for

- a. Careful exegesis
 - i. Am I re-saying what the Word has said?
 - ii. Has this passage surprised me?
- b. Rhetorical craft
 - i. Big Idea, clear outlines, clear transitions, order/unity/progress
 - ii. Rhetorical flourishes

III. Big Questions: Are we in the Spirit's 'slipstream' when we preach?

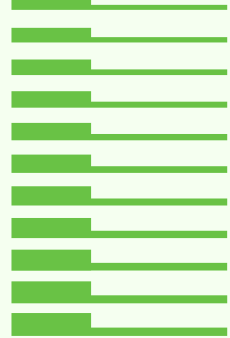
- a. Spirit power is not a formula
 - i. 'the wind blows where it pleases' (John 3)
 - ii. You can't programme a revival

-
-
- b. BUT you can preach in line with the Holy Spirit's ministry
 - i. Be driven by the Spirit-inspired scriptures (theopneustos)
 - 1. Ezra's expositional preaching (Neh 7)
 - 2. Paul 'reasoned from the scriptures'
 - 3. 'Do not depart from what is written'
 - ii. Aim to separate soul and spirit - 'cut to the heart' (Acts 2:41)
 - 1. NOT a lecture on content (application and illustration throughout)
 - 2. Seek an encounter with God through the Word
 - 3. Convicting of 'sin, righteousness and judgement to come'
 - c. Be Prophetic, Pointed, Prayerful
 - i. Desperate for God to work
 - ii. 'I will not let you go until you bless me' (Jacob and Angel)
 - iii. Martin Lloyd Jones, 'it felt like giving birth'

Notes



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Session 3

Evangelistic Preaching

Rick Buck

Evangelistic Preaching

NextLevelPreaching Network
Rick Buck, Leadership Advancement Director, FEB Central

1. Introduction

My Story

Assumptions

- *That you clearly understand the gospel and can articulate it.*
- *The distinction but interdependent relationship of Apologetics and Evangelism.*
- *The preaching of the gospel has significance for both the unbeliever and believer (as mentioned above in my story).*

2. Evangelism in the NT

I would like to suggest that the NT describes at least three kinds of evangelism to us. We need to emphasize the balancing of these different kinds of evangelism in the church.

Relational/Team Evangelism

- *This is probably the most well-known and emphasized kind of evangelism in the NT.*
- *The mission of making disciples (Matt 28:18-20) and sharing the gospel is not the responsibility of a few but of the whole church.*
- *Through the totality of our lives we are to be witnesses to the reality, reliability and relevance of Jesus Christ to all people (Acts 1:8). We are all to be salt and light to our world (Matt 5:13-16). We are to be ready to give an answer for our hope to everyone everywhere (1 Pet 3:15).*
- *Statistics show that most people who come to faith in Christ, come in large part through extended and multiple connections with believers.*

Personal/Cold connection Evangelism

- *Some call this confrontational evangelism; a personal yet more formal presentation of the message of Jesus Christ, with or without relational context.*
- *Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26ff); Jesus' encounter with the woman of Samaria (John 4).*
- *Some have suggested that this is primarily the work of those with the gift of evangelism, but all believers can and should have some of these kinds of conversations/presentations*

Proclamational Evangelism

- *Illustrated in Acts 2 as Peter preached to the crowds.*
- *This may be a person with the gift of evangelism (Eph 4:11; Acts 21:8) but it may also be a pastor or spiritual leader who has a heart for people coming to faith in Christ (2 Tim 4:5). This is an important part of Pastoral ministry. (1 Cor 9:16; Rom 1:15)*
- *This kind of evangelism is part of the calling of both the Evangelist and the Pastor. Some may minimize such evangelism as old school and insignificant, but I would suggest that evangelistic preaching (especially with an apologetic bent) is very powerful and continues to be used by God to bring people to faith in Christ.*
- *I would also suggest that this can and most often will be used by God in conjunction with the personal and relational witness of believers.*
- *I would also argue that, considering the growing biblical illiteracy in the church as well as in the culture, more people in the church will not have a clear understanding and possession of the gospel. We must come to terms with the fact that more of the people in our churches are lost even though they may think they are saved. Intra-evangelism and evangelistic preaching, then, should be an important aspect today of our overall evangelistic strategy.*

We need to make a distinction between evangelistic preaching/proclamation and the preaching of the gospel. While all preaching should be gospel centered and make a pathway to faith in Jesus, not every sermon is necessarily an evangelistic sermon. Every sermon should have a gospel application, but it may not include beginning in faith with Jesus. Although I would argue that almost every biblical message has the potential for an evangelistic thrust or application (see Keller quote below).

3. Gospel Centered Preaching

Jesus as interpretive key and spiritual solution

- *Jesus made it very clear that all of Scripture either directly or indirectly points to Him and is fulfilled in Him (Luke 24:27; Matt 5:17).*
- *Paul said “but we preach Christ crucified” (1 Cor. 1:23). As Charles Spurgeon pointed out, “A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it.” As my friend Rick Reed has said, “While there is only one path to God (through Christ—John 14:6), there are many paths to Christ. In fact, a trailhead for a pathway to Christ and His gospel can be found in every passage in Scripture. In a real sense, all scriptural roads lead to Jesus” (Dr. Rick Reed).*
- *The gospel is as important for those “in Christ” as it is for those “outside of Christ.” The gospel message is not simply about forgiveness but about full and complete restoration to God’s original plan for us and creation. The gospel then is the solution to every human problem.*

Aspects of the Gospel

- *The reason the gospel is as much for believers as it is for unbelievers is because of what the work of Christ has accomplished. In the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of Christ we have everything that we need to be what God created us to be.*
- *“The gospel is not just the means by which people get converted, but also the way Christians solve their problems and grow. The typical approach to the gospel is to see it as the “ABCs” of Christian doctrine only, the minimum truth required to be saved, the admissions test, the entry point. Then it is understood that we make progress in the Christian life through the application of the other (more advanced) biblical principles. If that were the case, then of course we could not do both evangelism and spiritual formation at the same time. Yet the gospel not only is the way we are saved but also is always the solution to every problem and the way to advance at every stage in the Christian life” (Keller, 119).*
- *The evangelistic task focuses on the first step of starting with Jesus while also seeing it as a point of entry to the full and complete victory over the very presence and power of sin and death.*

4. The Importance of Calling people to faith in Christ in Preaching

The importance of Evangelistic Preaching

Romans 10:11-15 - *11 As Scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame.” 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

Possible Evangelistic Sermon Passages

Luke 18:9-14

Luke 23 – Thief on the Cross

John 3, 11, 14

Romans 3, 5, and 10

Acts 2, 10, 17

Ephesians 2

Philippians 3

1 Peter 1

Cross and Resurrection passages

Resources for Evangelistic Preaching

Preaching by Tim Keller

The Reason for God by Tim Keller

Making Sense of God by Tim Keller

I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist by Geisler and Turek

The Air We Breathe by Glen Scrivener

Evangelistic Invitations

You should be able to give a verbal summary of the gospel without it being formulaic in just a couple of minutes. I invite people to pray and call out in faith to Jesus Christ. I may give them an example prayer. But I also stress that this response has meaning only as they sense God by His Spirit speaking to them. I don't want anyone to feel that they are being manipulated.

No prayer has ever saved anyone; only Jesus saves. Only faith in Him brings salvation (Acts 16:31). I think it is accurate to say that there really is no sinners' prayer in the NT (the closest might be the cry of the thief on the cross). We need therefore to be careful about trying to control this and require someone to pray such a prayer.

On the other hand, I believe it is more than all right to use a tool like a prayer to help people begin their relationship with Jesus. Just like Jesus' prayer was not meant to be mindlessly regurgitated, so we don't want a formulaic prayer that is merely spoken and not believed. On the other hand, Jesus' prayer is a great model prayer that helps to cover the important elements of a healthy prayer life. It is certainly acceptable to pray the Lord's prayer and it is very good to use it as a model prayer to guide our prayers.

The last thing I will mention about invitations is that it is important to begin the follow up in the invitation. Encourage them to reach out and share their commitment of faith with someone they know or a spiritual leader. We need to encourage them to take next steps.

5. Lessons Learned in Evangelistic Preaching

Preaching Lessons

- *The importance of humour (especially self-deprecating humour)*
- *Can't be too long, especially if you are speaking directly to the unreached*
- *Funerals – the only real hope in the face of the fleeting and fragile nature of life is Jesus*

-
-
- *Be conscious of your audience and adapt appropriately (see Acts and different approaches)*
 - *Use the calendar to guide you in evangelistic preaching – especially Christmas and Easter*
 - *Can't avoid the hard topics*
 - *Must address the misconceptions (use apologetics)*
 - *Variety - "In a real sense, all scriptural roads lead to Jesus"*

Evangelistic Lessons

- *Make clear that Jesus is more than just a way to receive forgiveness, but he is not less*
- *Make clear what the Bible means we are all sinners*
- *Be balanced in the presentation of both divine judgement and existential meaning through Christ*
- *Be careful with the invitation, but don't fail to call people to faith and next steps*
- *Highlight the uniqueness of the Christian message of salvation*

Notes



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CASE STUDY 1



Session 4

Preaching to the Next Generation

Dustin Boreland

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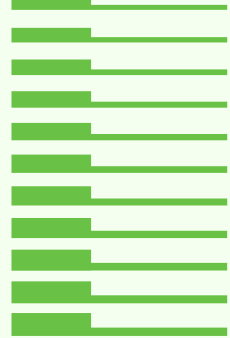


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Session 5

Preaching with the Listener in Mind

Steve Adams

Preparing and Preaching with the Listener in Mind

Steve Adams, Leadership Catalyst

Introduction:

Effective preaching involves both content and process.

1) Four elements of the Preaching Event

- a) Before I preach
- b) As I begin to preach
- c) As the message unfolds
- d) As I finish the message concludes
- e) After I preach

2) Three Realities of the Preaching Event

A preacher helps the listener by:

- a) Understanding self
- b) Understanding the congregation
- c) Understanding the environment

Preaching with the Listener in Mind

1) Before I preach

a) Am I ready in my soul?

- A model for others to follow - 1 Tim 3 – people become who we are, not what we say.
- A vessel worthy of the honour – Rom 12:1-2
- A continual meeting of the qualification – 1 Cor 9:26-27 – “Get home before dark” - don’t get complacent. Don’t live by assumptions – pay attention to yourself.

b) Am I convinced in my mind?

Preaching is the God-sanctioned method for the transformation of lives. 1 Corinthians 1:18–25 (ESV)

1 Corinthians 1:18–25 (ESV)

¹⁸ For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased

God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.²² For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.²⁵ For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Preaching is the God-sanctioned mandate for the transformation of lives – 2 Tim 4:1-2 2

Timothy 4:1–3 (ESV)

¹ I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

c) Am I clear in my task?

Communicators

- 1. Audience centered*
- 2. Concerned with being appropriate.*
- 3. Message to be embraced.*

Preachers

- 1. God centered*
- 2. A message to deliver – in humble confidence.*
- 3. Calls for a decision – or action – but not “a sell the farm every week.”*
 - That which is not transformative becomes addictive

Preaching is the communication of Biblical truth with a view toward persuasion.
- The emphasis is on the transformed life.

Teaching is the communication of Biblical truth with a view toward persuasion – The emphasis is on the transfer of truth to the heart.

d) Am I settled in my preparation?

- I have given this message my best effort.
- I have sought the Spirit’s affirmation of it.
- I have asked for the Lord’s protection from pride and pain.

2) As I begin to preach

A good start...

1. Makes a connect
2. Answers the... "Why this sermon?"
3. Keeps the listener as voluntary: I might need this!
4. Declares the destination

Note: for guest preaching, see further notes for helpful considerations

Three Questions Asked of Every Preacher at Every Sermon

1. Do you care about me? - disposition
2. Can and will you help me? – who is this actually about.
3. Can I trust you – John 1:14

3) As the message unfolds

Structure

- a) Am I anchored to the overarching theme of the message and revisit it?
- b) is there a sense the message is heading in a direction, and all content will help the listener get there?
- c) will it be clear at the end how we got to the destination?

Illustrations as Windows (Rick Reid)

- a) Some let in light (illumination)
- b) Some let in air (a breather from the tension)
- c) Some let in warmth (make a heart connection)

Anticipate

- a) Questions being asked by congregants.
- b) That some may need to have their attention rekindled.

As a preacher – know yourself - like your self - be yourself. Let your passion be believable, your personality be real, and your conviction evident.

Cautions...

1. Preaching is an outflow of ministry perspective.
2. Be careful to distinguish – Biblical truth vs. personal preference.
3. Choose your battles carefully - What makes me pound the table and weep? What are the jewels in my experience?
4. Don't make your pulpit be a performance detached from your reality.

4) As I finish, the message concludes

The listener needs

1. A conclusion before they want you to be done.
2. To be pastored and here your heart not your notes.
3. To be centered again as you conclude.
4. To not be distracted.

Let the Spirit conclude the service - allow the Spirit of God to do His work and don't allow less important elements compete.

Remember..

- a) The goal of all ministry is life transformation.
Axis – God's glory – human activity --> Transformation
- b) We must expect change – never be hesitant about asking for it!

5) After I preach

Beaware of...

1. Criticism cloaked as insight – is the speaker attempting to help or hurt?
2. Insight cloaked in criticism.
3. Being wounded.
4. Being genuinely misunderstood – we don't always get it right and the listener doesn't always get it right.
5. Being needed vs being available.

Further Notes

As a guest preacher you will need to be informed in several areas....

1. How long is the preaching time?
2. What is the preaching culture – movement, elements in the message, formality etc.
3. What is the translation that is normally used?
4. What will the church need from you pre-Sunday and when?
5. What is the arrival time?
6. Are there other responsibilities beyond the sermon? – communion, pastoral prayer, scripture reading etc.
7. What is the service order?
8. What is the expected way of concluding my sermon?
9. what is the appropriate attire? – i.e. the last three Sundays

What about my demeanor can hinder my ability to be heard? - Pride!

How to Guard Against Pride

1. There is nothing in my life to make a statement about – Christ alone.
2. You cannot determine your significance in life when evaluated at any time in your life.

We really do not know what is strategic. Hebrews 11:35-40.

3. The significance of my life is then not determined by the place/position of my ministry.

- Firstly, we are servants of Christ – possessed by another
- We operate from a place of privilege- manage what has belonged to another – he owns us – we manage.
- The outcomes are God's– we must be faithful and not intoxicated by platform – Very few people can handle success. Don't ever seek to own what God does. PREACH AND PRAY AND PLUG AWAY!

Four Governing Convictions About Demeanor in Preaching

1. Do not tell God how to use you – do not edit God or typecast yourself.
2. What God has for me, no mortal being can take away – do not compete or compare.
3. Do not operate from giftedness – operate from brokenness.
4. Remember; there are no small churches and there are no big pastors.

Anecdote: A young preacher was asked to fill in for his wise and godly mentor one Sunday. When the time came to preach, he marched up to the pulpit with an aura of authority and pride. Thirty minutes later he came down defeated and humbled knowing his message had been driven by the flesh and not by the Spirit. Afterward his mentor whispered gently in his ear... *"If you had went up the way you came down, you would of came down the way you went up."*

A Heart Prepared to Preach

Consistent, godly disciplines – consistent quiet times because we are dead without God. We depend on it.

Reading for depth – not for distance.

A rigorous prayer life - organize prayers by days of the week.

Obedient – a heart and life submitted to God. Cultivating an obedient heart. Blessedness will bring brokenness (ballast – so you don't float too high in the water).

Repentance – a heart and life that yearns for God.

Reliance – a heart and life that relinquishes control.

Mentors – firm loving voices.

Notes



A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.

Book Recommendations

Recommendations from today's Next Level Preaching speakers

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Rick Buck

Leadership Advancement Director

Rick@febcentral.ca

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Our FEB Central Consultation Team has over 250 years of ministry experience with consultation work in over 500 churches. The team brings a wealth of biblical wisdom and practical know-how to the consultation process.

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WHAT CHURCHES ARE SAYING

"The consultation process was immensely helpful for our church family. I would recommend this consultation to every Fellowship church."

Marshall Morden
Memorial Baptist, Stratford

"By God's grace, our church has had a number of wins over the last few years. The FEB Central Consult team helped us to foresee potholes and adjust to new realities as we move forward for His glory."

Tim Cressman
Bluewater Baptist, Sarnia

"This consultation was informative, comprehensive, and beneficial for us as leaders to see how to move forward with the growth that God has provided."

Kevin Furtney
First Baptist, Timmins

CONSULTATION PROCESS

It takes four months lead time from the decision to proceed with the consultation until the consultation weekend. Our team provides ongoing support following the consultation.

PHASE 1: Gathering Congregational Information

The church completes a church-wide online congregational survey, a leadership survey, and information about baptisms, membership, history and other areas of the church.

PHASE 2: Team Analysis

Our Consultation Team analyzes the information and produces a simple report based on prayer, study and experience. The report is presented in a power point presentation and consists of four sections: Demographics, Encouragements, Concerns and Recommendations.

PHASE 3: Consultation Weekend

Our Team visits the church to share the report with church leadership on Saturday, making any needed adjustments before presenting to the whole church on Sunday.

PHASE 4: Implementation and Ongoing Support

Our Team stays in contact with the pastor and key leaders, offering coaching and on-site consulting to implement the recommendations, for as long as it is needed.

CONSULTATION COST

We offer Church Vitality Consultations at no cost to FEB Central churches, as the consultation itself is funded through our churches' *Stronger Together* contributions.

We ask churches to pay the expenses for the congregational survey (\$300, paid to our Fellowship Pacific Region), and assist our team with travel costs. For any church in need of assistance, we will cover these ancillary costs.



OUR TEAM



TIM STRICKLAND

Director of Church Vitality
Consultation Team Leader



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RICK BUCK

Leadership Advancement
Director



BLAIR HICKS

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And let us consider how to stir one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

Appendix 1

Sermon provided by Rick Buck

What's So Different About Christianity?

Rom. 3:21-26; Lk. 18:9-14

Introduction:

What makes Christianity unique from every other world religion? Why is Jesus the only answer for people's right relationship with God? At a popular level, most people in the West don't believe Christianity really is different. It is common today to say that all religions are essentially the same in that they each teach people how to find God through a pursuit of moral goodness (paths up the mountain). At one level religions may look different at a surface level, people say, but at a deeper level they are actually the same. But in fact the opposite is really true. At a surface level they look similar, sharing some common moral elements, but a deeper level they are not the same. I have already made the point that the various world religions make very different claims about God, and the human condition, many of which are completely incompatible with one another. For example, either God is an impersonal force or He is a personal being, but God can't be both. In fact, Christianity makes critical claims that are totally different from any other religion of the world. So much so that while it is possible to speak of Christianity as a religion in a broader sense, in truth biblical Christianity is the farthest thing from a religion. **Dane Ortlund writes, "Christianity is the *unreligion*. It turns all our religious instincts on their heads Christianity is the unreligion because it is the one faith whose founder tells us to bring *not our doing, but our need*."** The way the gospel describes salvation and the way the religions of the world describe it are at opposite ends of the spectrum. **As Tim Keller points out, "All the other major faiths have founders who are teachers that *show* the way to salvation. Only Jesus claimed to actually *be* the way of salvation himself."** In other words, while other worldviews are centred on human initiative and effort to keep religious rules, Christianity is about a relationship with God through the gracious and loving intervention and action of God Himself. Religion has been described as man's best attempt at finding God, whereas the gospel, Christianity, is really about God's best effort to find us. **TEXT: Rom. 3:21-26; Lk. 18:9-14**

Development:

TEXT: Rom. 3:21-26. This text really outlines the huge difference between religion and Christianity. **1. Religion is about what man does; Christianity is about what God has done in Jesus Christ.** Most religions of the world acknowledge and agree that man has a problem that needs to be fixed. Call it sin, call it selfishness, call it brokenness; man is simultaneously heroic and wretched. He is capable of beautiful thoughts and deeds and at the same time plans and performs deeply selfish and destructive deeds. Paul here says that every human being is infected with this cancer of self centeredness at the cost of God and others **(v. 23); and this has created a separation between God and His creation.** We were made in God's image but that image has been shattered and distorted by the reality of sin. What is the solution to this problem? **This is where the gospel and every other religious worldview part ways.** Religion

says that we can fix this problem ourselves by doing better and doing more. **“Religion in general is man’s strategic manual for how to reach God” (Dinesh D’Souza)**. But the Bible tells us that the gospel is not religion in this sense. No matter how hard we try we can’t reach God and His perfect standard (**Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8-9**) – God’s too high and too far for us to reach on our own. The point is that we can no more bridge the gap between us and God than we can jump flat footed across the Grand Canyon or climb to heaven on a six foot ladder. **That’s why God had to reach down to us (vv. 21-22)**; scandalously, God became one of us, in the person of Jesus Christ, and took upon Himself the burden and debt of our sins. [**“The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God” (C. S. Lewis).**]

The point is that religion can’t do **what only God can do**. Religion focuses on man’s achievements; Christianity focuses on what God has accomplished (and is accomplishing, and will accomplish) in Jesus Christ. Religion is about us trying to solve the problem. Eastern religion tells us that through meditation we confront our selfish desires and seek to eliminate self. In effect we seek to extinguish the self and become nothing. Through meditation and disciplined self renunciation we strive toward the goal. In Islam and Judaism people seek through the law to please God and reform self. To be morally better is the goal, hoping that God is not too concerned about the details and thoroughness of His law. Even in nominal Christianity the focus is on being a better person, hoping that in the end our good deeds will outweigh our bad deeds and God will look the other way as judge (fudging on the details of our profound debt against Him). But in fact, Christianity raises the bar much higher than any of these religious standards. The true standard is not a horizontal one, comparing ourselves with each other (I’m better than so and so, not as good as so and so) **but a vertical one – God and His perfection (cf. 3:23)**. Being good then is obviously not good enough. What is needed is the restoration of Eden, to get us back to perfection (which is impossible to do on our own). Remember the quote from **Bishop Moule** a few weeks ago. **“Perhaps they (the worst sinners) stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp; but you are as little able to touch the stars as they.”** Why doesn’t God just forgive us? Whenever there is sin or an offense there is a cost that must be paid by someone (either the guilty party or someone else). Here is the problem: we don’t owe God a few hundred bucks, we owe Him millions. How in the world then can God be the just judge of the world and still provide a way for us to be rescued from this debt and His just judgement? God’s answer is Jesus – His answer is for God to come and among us in Jesus, and to die for us on the cross – making the payment that we couldn’t make for our sin (**v. 24 “redemption”**). **Illustration – We Can’t Pay. As one preacher put it, “Christ paid a debt he didn’t owe, because we owe a debt we cannot pay.”** Not only has God through His Son paid our debt, but through Jesus’ resurrection and the giving of the Spirit we now have all the life and wealth of God can be ours, which changes us into what God created us to be. This text says He not only pays for our sin and forgives us but gives us the totality of His righteousness. Dinesh D’Souza writes, “No other religion can even conceive this.” Here is the uniqueness of Christianity, God taking the initiative and becoming a man, sacrificing Himself for His creation to remake us into all He created us to be. **John Stott writes, “The essence of sin is we human**

beings substituting ourselves for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for us. We . . . put ourselves where only God deserves to be; God . . . puts himself where we deserve to be.” What this means then is that salvation is the *gift of God Himself*. God gives us many wonderful gifts but the greatest gift is the gift of Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ. Do you see? **Salvation is not simply a gift from God, it is the gift of God.** Heaven isn't simply about a place but a person. It is about the fullness of the person of God. To have deliverance from our sin then doesn't simply mean assent to some rational answer but personal trust in a person – Jesus Christ (Jn. 11:25-26; Jn. 14:6). I'm not simply accepting that Christ died to save others or mankind but that he died to save to me. This is what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of being born again. Jesus then is the critical point of uniqueness in Christianity (His cross and resurrection). **Illustration – He doesn't simply show us the way, He is the way (Video).** Application: Tool/handle **(DO & DONE)**. *This leads to a critical second point of uniqueness.*

TEXT: Lk. 18:9-14. 2. Religion is about proudly keeping the rules; Christianity is about a humble faith relationship with Christ. Notice what Jesus is teaching in this passage. Sin and evil, self-centredness and pride can be expressed in different ways. One way is to be bad and break all the rules, another way is to be very good and become self righteous (Lk 15 - prodigal son vs. the elder brother). The point is that there are two ways to become Lord of your own life (to replace God). One way is to rebelliously do life “your way” (like Frank Sinatra), letting no one but you call the shots; another way is to live such a good that you feel God is obligated to respond to your performance. In the first instance you ignore Jesus, and in the second you turn Jesus from Saviour and Lord into teacher and helper (in both cases Jesus has been replaced). **“It is possible to avoid Jesus as Savior as much by keeping all the Biblical rules as by breaking them. Both religion (in which you build your identity on your moral achievements) and irreligion (in which you build your identity on some other secular pursuit or relationship) are, ultimately, spiritually identical courses to take” (Keller).** Keller goes on to say that Satan if anything prefers religious people. **“They are more unhappy than either mature Christians or irreligious people, and they do a lot more damage.”** Here in this passage, the shocking thing, according to Jesus, is that the religious person is not right with God and the sinner is right with God. One proudly thinks God owes Him, and the other humbly knows that acceptance can only be based on grace and mercy. There is a huge gap here in understanding. **Cf. Jn. 9:39-41 (Lk. 5:30-32).** Religion says I obey and then I'm accepted; Christianity says, I'm accepted therefore I obey. Here is the wild thing. Two people can be sitting next to one another at church and one gets the true biblical message of Christianity and the other is trying to do religion. You can have two people who pray, and give and serve; they both may be faithful to their spouses and their families. Or like in this story that Jesus told one may have failed greatly and the other may have it seemingly all together. Yet, Jesus says appearances may be deceiving. It might not be what you think (application: test?). What is the difference? What was the difference between Saul and David, between Peter and Judas, Cain and Abel? The heart! Motivation, the will, is the critical difference. One is going through the external motions, the other is responding from the

heart. In religion we are striving to obey out of fear. If we don't measure up then we will lose God's favour. Or we do good and proudly go forward with the expectation that God will respond to our performance. In the gospel, the motivation is gratitude for the mercy and grace of God toward us in Christ. The religious person is forced into obedience out of fear, the true follower of Christ passionately obeys, motivated by a desire to represent the one who poured out his life for us. Tim Keller points out that religion tends to lead to fear and pride but in the gospel I have the proper antidote to these two sides of the coin of self; it leads me to be both confident and humble at the same time. **"The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me. This leads to deep humility and deep confidence at the same time. It undermines both swaggering and sniveling. I cannot feel superior to anyone, and yet I have nothing to prove to anyone. I do not think more of myself nor less of myself. Instead, I think of myself less."** Application: the idol of self and the fixation on self in our culture is destroying our culture. Religion is really the product of self worship. The way to be truly free is not to focus on self but to focus on Christ who will shape me into the best me I can be. Remember the words of Jesus. **Cf. Matt. 10:39: "finds his life . . . and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** Cf. Matt. 22:37-39; Gal. 2:20. The point is that Christianity is all about grace; this is what makes it unique. The only ones that God can help are those that don't come with their resume of goodness, but instead look to God's goodness in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion/Application:

Some might say well all that you've said so far is the problem I have with Christianity. "What you are saying is that it costs nothing. I can't accept that." That statement though is an indication that you still don't get grace. **Illustration – cliff.** Let me also clarify something. We are not talking about believing in Jesus and then just living any old way we want. Christianity is not getting a fire insurance policy and then going to play on the living room floor with matches. True grace doesn't work that way. The equation of religion is **faith in Jesus + works = salvation.** A grace relationship with Jesus Christ looks like **faith in Jesus + nothing = salvation + works.** In other words the unique Christian message is **We are not saved by works but genuine faith in Christ leads to a salvation that works.** The person who has truly encountered the love of God in Jesus Christ is changed from the inside out. **Cf. Lk. 7:36-48.** When you really see the love of God, it transforms you. **What does any true, healthy loving relationship look like?** When I asked my wife if she would marry me and she said yes, I didn't respond "Great, now I can act any way I want towards her." Love transforms duty into delight. When I entered my love relationship with Jo it was my desire to anticipate her desires and act in her best interest even before she asked for something. I don't say to my wife I must kiss you, neither do I say I don't need to kiss you. I must kiss her but not must in the sense of obligation but must in the sense of delight. True love is an inside out reality, a heart desire to act in the best interest of the one you love. When you encounter true loving kindness, grace, as the Bible calls it, radically changes you from the inside out. **Cf. Phil. 3:1-10; 2 Cor. 5:14-15.**

Appendix 2

Sermon provided by Rick Buck

Friendship Sunday

Do Good People Go to Heaven?

Introduction:

A little boy was waiting for his mother to come out of a store. As he waited, he was approached by a man who asked, "Son, can you tell me where the post office is?" The little boy replied, "Sure, just go straight down the street a couple of blocks and turn to your right." The man thanked the boy kindly and said, "I'm the new preacher in town and I'd like for you to come to church on Sunday. I'll show you how to get to Heaven." The little boy replied with a chuckle, "*Aawww, come on; you don't even know the way to the post office!*" Isn't that the truth! Most people believe in heaven, but the question is who really knows how to get there. Some years ago Haddon Robinson talked to people in downtown Dallas, TX and of the seventy five people who said they believed in heaven only two could give any confident answer of who goes there. There was a Sunday school teacher whose assignment was to explain to six year olds in his class what someone had to do in order to go to heaven. In an attempt to discover what the kids already believed about the subject, he asked them some questions. "If I sold my house and my car, and gave all my money to the poor and to the church, would that get me into heaven?" NO! the children answered. "Well then," he said, "if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?" Again they all shouted "NO!" "Well then, how can I get into heaven?" A boy in the back row stood up and shouted, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!"

Beyond this prerequisite, that's pretty much where the agreement ends. We all want to go to heaven, but most people aren't really sure how they can be sure they will go to heaven. What if I told you that the Bible clearly tells us how we can be right with God and spend forever with Him? I don't know the way, but God has shown us the way. And it isn't the way most people think. You see, the most common popular belief is that *good people go to heaven*. The logic kind of goes like this: there is a good God who lives in a good place reserved for good people. No one really knows what the standard of good really is and each religion has a different standard of good, but in general this is the popular belief across the globe. The Bible teaches something very different, unique among all the religions of the world. It says that *good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people go to heaven*. The truth is that compared to God, none of can really be called good, and all of our achievements are a futile attempt to pay back

the debt we owe God. The only way we can get to heaven is through faith in Jesus Christ. **TEXT:**
Philippians 3:1-11.

Development:

Good People Don't Go to Heaven (3:1-6). Paul is reviewing with the people in the Philippian church things he has already shared with them (**v. 1**). It appears that there were some people who claimed to be Christian Jews who were coming into their church (after Paul had been there) and telling them that it wasn't enough for them to just believe in Jesus. What they needed was to be circumcised and do the good deeds of the law (to become Jews). Paul has some strong words for these people (**v. 2**) who were trying to say that being good is just as important as believing in Jesus Christ. While it is true that the Holy Spirit changes someone who believes in Jesus Christ and makes them good, it is not true that trying to be good is how we become right with God. This false teaching gives Paul a chance to remind these people what really counts. What counts, what has value in the eyes of God is not what we as humans achieve, but what God has accomplished in his Son, Jesus Christ (**v. 3**). Paul then gives himself as an example of someone who possessed lots of good, religious, deeds (**vv. 4-6**). He says look at my pedigrees, my achievements, my good deeds. He was circumcised, he was a Jew from one of the most important tribes, he was a Pharisee, a guardian of righteousness, with no outstanding public contradictions in his life, and he had a genuine passion for opposing the enemies of God. It is an impressive resume of goodness. If anyone should make it into heaven, it would be this man. Today, we might look at someone like Mother Theresa, or Billy Graham and say for sure, if anyone is getting in these people are. But like most "religious" people today, Paul had enough morality and goodness to keep him out of trouble, but not enough goodness to get him into heaven. In fact, what Paul is pointing out is that it was not the bad things in his life that kept him away from Jesus – it was the good things! He had to let go of his goodness to find God's forgiveness and life transformation in Jesus Christ. Paul is doing a self audit and admitting that before Jesus Christ, he was bankrupt, even though it looked like he was loaded with cash and assets.

Forgiven People Go to Heaven (3:7-11). In fact Paul says I want you to know that what I thought was wealth I now realize was worthless and even holding me back from a true forever relationship with Jesus Christ (**vv. 7-8**). I had to let go of that self made righteousness to be able to receive the true wealth of Jesus' forgiveness and power to change me. Have you ever been to a garage sale? It is amazing how

one person's junk is another's treasure. In the eyes of God what we think is valuable, he sees as destined to the garbage dump. And what many see as insignificant and worthless, God sees as absolutely invaluable – a treasure beyond comprehension. On the Damascus road, Paul had a complete conversion of what he put his confidence in. It is interesting that Paul uses the phrase “rubbish” to describe his former achievements and good deeds. *Isaiah 64:6 says “all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags.”* So many verses of the Bible stress that we are not saved, or made right with God because of the righteous things we have done, but because of the mercy of God in Jesus Christ (**Tit. 3:5; Eph. 2:8-9; Rom. 3:20**). Why? It is because we don't really understand what our sin is, and the debt we owe God. Because of God's perfection and goodness our offenses are heinous beyond comprehension. **Illustration – sin is terrible because it is against God; stealing vs. stealing from your mother; spiritual adultery/unfaithfulness.** When we really understand the nature of our sin, and our offense against God, then we will understand why our few good deeds are meaningless to God as a payment. It is like we owe God 10 million and we throw him a \$20 here and there and expect that to compensate. It can't. **Illustration – we can't pay; toddler break's a window.** We are like these children; we can't afford to pay, but God has paid the debt himself through Jesus Christ.

That is why Paul is so overjoyed. **What he gained because of his faith in Christ was really three things.** First, he gained freedom **from the penalty of sin.** He was forgiven by God and all the wealth of Jesus became his (**v. 9**). Paul says that what he could not achieve on his own Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection. It is like Paul looked down at his spiritual/moral bank records and realized that he was bankrupt. Then he looked at Christ's record and saw that in his perfection he was wealthy beyond comprehension. When Paul trusted Christ, he watched as God erased his debt and put all of the wealth of Jesus into his account. **Illustration – transfer of accounts.** God wants to make you the wealthiest person in the universe today. The treasure is found not in physical dollars, but in spiritual currency. The treasure is in Jesus Christ. Jesus accomplished what Paul could never achieve. Through faith what Jesus did became Paul's and God forgave Paul the huge debt that he owed. Theologians call this justification, being declared righteous by God. Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.

But in Jesus we have more than freedom from the penalty of sin. Paul also got **freedom from the power of sin (v. 10).** The new life God gives us only begins when we believe in Jesus. The journey of knowing Jesus better and better was now a reality for Paul. God not only wants to forgive us but to change us and get us ready for heaven, making us more like Jesus, tasting of the very power that raised Him from the dead (cf. Eph. 1:19; 3:13-21). So when Paul became a Christian it was not the end, but the beginning. His experience with Christ was transformational, continuing into eternity. God even used

the suffering and challenges of his life to make him more Christlike in his character, to move him towards heaven. God through the power of Christ was enabling him to convert even the effects of sin and suffering to his good. Theologians have called this sanctification, being more and more set apart to God.

Finally, Paul also gained one more thing: **freedom from the very presence of sin (v. 11)**. Paul's hope was not simply this life but the next. Paul was looking forward to that future day of the return of Jesus Christ and the resurrection when God would finish what he had started in Paul's life and in the world. He didn't know the time and the circumstances of that happening (whether through Jesus' coming in his lifetime; or would he die and then rise from the dead), but somehow he knew that he would attain the resurrection from the dead. This was all his in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion:

Good people, don't go to heaven, forgiven people do. And the Bible is utterly clear that the only way we can be forgiven and have a forever life with God is through faith in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for us. But some people will say that isn't fair. Good people, sincere people should be able to get in. No, actually it isn't fair. And it is a good thing that God isn't fair. Why do I say that? Because the truth is that none of us is really good when compared to the standard of God's perfection. And God could very fairly condemn us all. Instead he opted to go beyond fairness to offer us not what we deserve but what we don't deserve. Instead of fairness, God offers us mercy and grace. He not only offers to erase our debt against Him, but to give us the wealth of His Kingdom. This is a kind of love that is mind numbing. Do you see? The reason good people don't go to heaven is that there aren't any perfectly good people. And if you say perfection is not the standard, then the question that must be asked is how good is good enough? And who sets the standard? And wouldn't it be strange that God wants us just to be good and then He doesn't inform us just how good we need to be. The truth is there are only sinners: forgiven sinners, and unforgiven sinners. Some might not be as bad as others, but from God's perspective we all have a debt we can't pay. Even the best believer is just a recovering hypocrite/sinner. **Illustration – Dorothy.** If we know Jesus, we are not perfect, but we are forgiven and we are on a journey towards being like Jesus, towards heaven.

Sometimes people will ask if Christianity is fair? What could be fairer than **John 3:16**. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** This verse tells us that everybody is welcome. Everybody gets in the same way. And everybody can meet the requirement, because God has provided what is needed through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the way, the passport, the bridge, the gate, into God’s heaven. He is God’s gift of love to meet our every need. But just like any gift of love, this gift can’t be forced. We must willingly embrace and receive it. **John 1:12** says **“To all who received Jesus, to those who believed in his name, God gave the right to become the children of God.”** This morning you can become a child of the King of the universe. You can be confident of your possession of heaven today. But that confidence only comes through trusting in Jesus Christ. **Illustration – family.**

In a moment I am going to pray. Maybe you are here this morning and you don’t have that confidence of a relationship with Jesus Christ. But you sense God through His Spirit is opening your spiritual eyes to see that being good is not enough; you must be forgiven, through faith in Jesus Christ. I would like to lead you in a prayer. Just saying a prayer won’t make you a Christian. Faith in Jesus alone is what saves us. But prayer can be the tool through which we express our genuine faith. So if this is your heart I’m going to ask you to pray this prayer quietly in your heart.

Heavenly Father, thank you for not simply giving us fairness. Thank you that you went beyond fairness, giving us mercy and grace in Jesus Christ. I acknowledge that I am a sinner, as we all are, and that I need your forgiveness. Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross for my sins and right now as best I know how, I put my absolute trust in Him for my forever relationship with you. I thank you that Jesus can change me and help me to become all that you intended me to be.

Counsellors here at the front. Packages to help you begin your new life with Christ. We want to help you take the next step in your journey. Tell someone.

Appendix 3

Sermon provided by Rick Buck

Outrageous Grace

Luke 23:38-43

Introduction:

This morning I want to focus our attention on some of the most shocking words Jesus Christ ever spoke. During that first Good Friday almost two thousand years ago, some of Jesus' last words to the man on the cross beside him were, **"Today you will be with me in paradise."** How is it possible for a criminal, who doesn't make right their wrongs, who knows they are guilty, to be promised total pardon and even, eternal paradise -- simply by asking for mercy?

Someone has said, **"Christianity is the *unreligion*. It turns all our religious instincts on their heads . . . Christianity is the *unreligion* because it is the one faith whose founder tells us to bring *not our doing, but our need*."** The religions of the world, if you will, try to **show us the way to salvation**. Jesus in contrast claimed to **be the way of salvation**. Religion teaches salvation through human performance and goodness; the Bible teaches salvation through divine intervention and grace. Religion is about our attempts to reach up to God, Christianity tells the shocking story of God reaching down to us in His Son. It is scandalous! **God's grace in Jesus is outrageous beyond our imagination.** God has humbled Himself to become one of us with the mission of serving His creation and pouring out His life for us, dying on a criminal's cross so that we could live with Him forever in paradise. **TEXT: Luke 23:38-43.**

Development:

Just before Jesus spoke these words to the man beside Him, he had been praying **"Father forgive them."** As others were mocking and insulting Jesus, He was repeatedly asking His Father to be merciful to those killing him. Jesus is both the perfect example of forgiving others, and He is the only way any of us can be forgiven by God.

Jesus now in essence answers his own prayer, revealing the depth of God's forgiveness to us all. **Luke** tells us that two criminals were crucified alongside of Jesus. **Matthew** tells us that at first both of these

men join the crowd in insulting Jesus (Matt. 27:44). In the beginning they both reject Jesus as Messiah/King. But at some point, during their excruciating death one changes his mind and heart about Jesus, the other does not. One humbly understands his need before God and reaches out for the help that only Jesus can give, the other does not. One wants physical deliverance from suffering, the other wants a future with Jesus, the Messiah King. Notice the contrast between these two people. One mocks like the religious leaders and **demands Jesus show His power to deliver (v. 39)**. This man is proud and unwilling to acknowledge his responsibility for his sin. He didn't really believe in Jesus, but if Jesus was the supposed King, he demanded that He get them all out of this jam. There is no sense of ownership of his guilt. For him, Jesus was only as good as His power to get him what he wanted. **App:** Lots of people approach God/Jesus this way. Jesus I won't surrender to your Kingship, but I will give you some recognition if you march to my drum and if you help me fulfill my agenda. If you relieve my difficulty, I will believe in you.

But notice the difference in the second man. He confesses his guilt before God and the innocence of Jesus (vv. 40-41). He fears God and recognizes that he is justly punished. He has the faith to believe that Jesus is the divine King who will live again on the earth and reign over all creation (v. 42). Even though Jesus is being crucified and will soon die, this man believes that Jesus will rise from the dead and establish His Kingdom on the earth. **He believes that Jesus has the power to save him physically but more importantly, he believes that Jesus has the power to save Him beyond this life.** "Remember me" is a cry for deliverance. He knew he didn't deserve it, but he humbly asked for God's grace in the face of his guilt. Essentially, both of these men cry out to Jesus "Save me!" but one is crying out in faith, hoping for mercy and forgiveness from Jesus in His future Kingdom and the other is demanding Jesus prove His claims.

The repentant thief got from Jesus way more than he asked for (v. 43). Not only will I remember you in my future Kingdom, but today you will be with me in paradise. **This word "paradise" is used two other times in the NT.** In **2 Cor. 12:4** the Apostle Paul talks about being caught up into Paradise and **Revelation 2:7** speaks of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God. At the end of Revelation (Rev. 22:1) the tree of life is described as close to the throne of God and the Lamb. **This is another description of heaven, the father's house.** Jesus said to the thief the same thing as he said to his disciples in John 14, describing the most beautiful part of heaven being that they would *be with him*. He promises him the fulness of His own and the Father's presence from the moment he dies. **Once again, we see the irony here.** The other criminal was mocking Jesus (v. 39), challenging Him to save them and get them all off the cross and now Jesus is doing just that in an ultimate way. He is bringing final, eternal salvation to one who is humbly repentant by staying on the cross and suffering in his place. In his staying on the cross He is engaged in the greatest act of salvation and rescue (from sin). Jesus promises this man that He will not

only remember him, but save him completely, eternally, by His own unwillingness to get down from the cross.

The phrase “**Truly I tell you**” is a phrase used only by Jesus to assure His listeners that what He is saying is guaranteed. It elevates the importance of what He is saying. As we are told in other parts of the Bible, for the one who trusts in Jesus Christ, to die means immediate entrance to heaven to be with Jesus (cf. **2 Cor. 5:6-9**).

Conclusion/Application:

What is it that we learn then from this promise of Jesus to the thief on the cross? **God’s grace in Jesus is outrageous beyond our imagination. It is beautifully scandalous.** For many people Jesus as the only way to God is both distasteful and offensive. The popular view is that there are many good ways to God. Surely a good person who doesn’t do too many bad things won’t face God’s judgement and a bad person who lived most, if not all of their life hurting others will face God’s judgment. **But that isn’t God’s way.** **Lutzer quote.** One of the proofs that the Bible’s message was not created by humans is that it doesn’t focus on our performance. God’s message is about His outrageous grace toward a rebellious creation. **One half of the scandal is that good people don’t automatically go to heaven, forgiven people do. But the other half of the scandal is that the worst criminal in history who dies as a repentant person, trusting in Jesus, can be forgiven. Illustration – Jeffrey Dahmer.** Is it possible that one of the most evil men to have ever lived was granted entrance into paradise to be with Jesus? **Yes, and yes.** If that possibility disturbs you, you may not yet fully understand the good news of Jesus Christ. Here is the thing, the Bible tears down the way of human merit and religious performance. **From the Bible’s perspective, none of us is really as good as we think.** We are all sinners and the distance between us is meaningless when compared with the distance between all of us and God. None of us have given God his due. As **Isaiah 53:6** says, we have all turned away like sheep and gone our own way. The radical message of the gospel is that **our problem of sin is way worse than we can imagine** and the solution of **God’s grace in Christ is way better than we could imagine. We are in fact all thieves before God.** We are not robbing banks or snatching purses from little old ladies walking down the street. But we are all robbing God every day. Life, breath and everything else are His good gifts and He legitimately expects us to acknowledge this and live accordingly. **And yet none of us have loved Him as He deserves.** In fact, we have all done the opposite. We each rob God of His due every day. We are all criminals on one side of the cross or the other from Jesus. We are either rejecting His outrageous grace or we are humbling receiving it. What matters is what we do with this outrageous grace in Jesus.

How beautifully outrageous is this message? It is way beyond fair. We don't get what we deserve; and we do get what we don't deserve. God's way isn't based on our past performance, heritage or capacities which varies from person to person and place to place. It isn't based on our resume of past successes or failures. It is based on God's unfathomable love in His Son. **We are all level at the cross.** We are all able to gain entrance to paradise through faith in Jesus. This grace is hopeful beyond imagination. Friends, it is never too late, and **no one is beyond God's outrageous grace.** It is all about what we do with God's gift of Jesus. Do we embrace Him in faith, or do we reject Him? The difference is Paradise gained and lost.

None of us really knows what goes on between God and people in the final moments of their life. Outside of the testimony of Scripture here and the fact that there were those present who heard this exchange between Jesus and the thief we would never know about what happened to this man. And most likely his family never knew about his faith in Jesus. That's good news. NO person is beyond the hope of God's outrageous grace. There will be lots of surprises in heaven (cf. Lk. 18:13-14). My brother. **"The Christian gospel is that I am so flawed that Jesus had to die for me, yet I am so loved and valued that Jesus was glad to die for me" (Tim Keller).**



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