

August 16th, 2020

The Supernatural Act of Preaching

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

Closer to Heaven or Hell

The Puritan John Preston once said that whenever Christ crucified is preached it always has the effect of moving us closer to heaven or closer to hell.¹ Richard Baxter said "...it is not small matter to stand up in the face of a congregation, and deliver a message of salvation or damnation, as from the Living God, in the name of our Redeemer."² There is no type of speech in all the world that is more loved or more hated than gospel preaching. There is no type of speech in all the world that is, at the same time, seen as infinitely wise and infinitely foolish as gospel preaching is. To those who are perishing it is folly, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. It is the one type of speech that human beings engage in that is supernatural. Paul calls it in our passage a "demonstration of the Spirit and power."

Paul's first two arguments against factions

The Apostle began his letter to the Corinthians Church by admonishing them for forming factions and divisions among themselves. Recall in **v.12** Paul 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." He has made two arguments against this nonsense so far. The **first argument** he made was that this type of worldly thinking is the very thing God has already destroyed. Worldly thinking cannot discover God's plan of salvation. Why return to it? That was in **v.18-25**. Paul's **second argument** was that the Corinthians as well as every single Christian has no ground to boast over each other, because God made us

¹ The exact quote is: "There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell." Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), pg. 95

² *ibid*

Christians through His free choice, and we had nothing to do with it so that no one could boast before Him. That was in v.26-31.

Argument #3: true gospel preaching is supernatural

Paul now begins his **third argument**. It is essentially this: dividing into factions based on anything in *this* or *that* particular preacher is worldly because it denies the truth about real preaching: it is the testimony from the Father, it is about the redemption of the Son, and it is made effective by the Holy Spirit alone. True gospel preaching has nothing to do with *the man*. **2 Corinthians 4:5** “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” [v.7] “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” True gospel preaching is a supernatural act. It is a demonstration of the Spirit and power.

The Big Idea...

The Holy Spirit is present in true gospel preaching so that our faith would rest in God alone

- ☆ The Authority of True Preaching
- ☆ The Agent of True Preaching
- ☆ The Aim of True Preaching

I. The Authority of True Preaching

The two-fold basis of authority

Where does the authority of true preaching come from? Two answers. The authority of true preaching is found **first** in it's origin, and **second** in it's

contents. In other words, true preaching is authoritative because of *where* it comes from, and *what* it proclaims.³

1. True preaching is authoritative because of its origin

Let's look first at its *origin*: true preaching is authoritative because of its origin. v.1 "And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you *the testimony of God* with lofty speech or wisdom." What is Paul proclaiming? The testimony of God. Not the testimony of Paul, *though* Paul gives his own testimony in several places. He's not proclaiming his own ideas, or his own personal philosophy about life. He's proclaiming the testimony *of God*. The Greek word for testimony is where we get the word martyr. A martyr is a witness. Gospel proclamation is God Himself testifying as a *witness*. It's *His* message. Paul is only a second-hand witness to God's testimony. The gospel finds its *origin* in God the Father. That's why it has ultimate authority. **1 John 5:10** puts it like this: "Whoever believes in the Son of God has *the testimony* in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in *the testimony that God* has borne concerning his Son." Anyone who rejects the gospel message is not rejecting the man who preaches it, they are rejecting God Himself, because the gospel is the testimony of God.

When Jesus sent out the disciples to preach the gospel, He told them in **Luke 10:16** "The one who hears you *hears me*, and the one who rejects you *rejects me*, and the one who rejects me *rejects him who sent me*."⁴ Do you see? Paul, here in v.1, is claiming that what He proclaiming is from God. Let that hit you. If you went to a mental institution and some guy named Bob in the hallway came up to you and told you "I have a message from God for you," you would

³ A presupposition that I begin this message with is this: the gospel message is not reserved for the lost; it's not only for conversion, but it is for ongoing edification for the saints. Paul already said that in **1:18** "... but *to us who are being saved* it (the gospel) is the power of God." That's why Paul said in **Romans 1:15** to a bunch of Christians who were already saved "I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome." The gospel is for the lost *and* for those who are already saved; for conversion and for edification.

⁴ Think of other illustrations of this principle from Scripture. When Israel rejected the prophet Samuel, the Lord told him in **1 Samuel 8:7** "...they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me..." When Israel grumbled against Moses instruction, he told them in **Exodus 16:8** "...the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord."

probably not believe him. But that is what Paul is doing here. And it is what every faithful preacher has done ever since. We ascend into this pulpit and say: “I have a message from God *for you*.” Any preacher who doesn’t believe that should never enter the pulpit. That’s the **first reason** true gospel preaching is authoritative: because it is the testimony of God Himself.

2. True preaching is authoritative because of it’s contents

Let’s look second at it’s *contents*: is authoritative because of it’s contents. Paul makes a negative statement first, and then a positive statement. Negatively he says in v.1 “...I...did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom.” These two terms: *lofty speech* and *wisdom* were the currency of the sophists. Remember that because Corinth was deeply embedded in the tradition of Greek philosophy and rhetoric, they prized both the wisdom of the philosophers and the lofty speech of the rhetoricians. Paul absolutely rejects this methodologies in his preaching Why? Because these things disguise the truth of the gospel. What is the first principle of the gospel? That you and I stand condemned before a holy God. What does lofty speech and worldly wisdom do with that? It conceals it. I experienced this recently at a funeral. The pastor explicitly said to a room filled with unbelievers that God is not angry at any of them. At every point where he ought to have used the word “sin” he used the word “mistake.” That’s lofty speech.⁵ What is a “mistake”? It is a depersonalized action that happens to be misguided or wrong. What is a “sin”? It is the betrayal of a relationship. A mistake is not that big of a deal. A sin is

⁵ James Sire provides an important comparison between a depersonalized and personalized view of the Christian faith.

	Depersonalized	Personalized
Sin	Breaking a rule	Betraying a relationship
Repentance	Admitting guilt	Sorrowing over personal betrayal
Forgiveness	Canceling a penalty	Renewing fellowship
Faith	Believing a set of propositions	Committing oneself to a Person
Christian Life	Obedying rules	Pleasing the Lord—a Person

refusing to give God what is His due. Paul is saying that he refused to preach in such a way where he concealed in truth of God in lofty speech or wisdom.

Lofty speech and worldly wisdom in our day

But we must press this point more. God-willing I will live the rest of my life in Boise and die in this Church. But some of you will move on. Children, some of you will grow up and take jobs in different cities. How will you choose a local Church? I can't think of a more important text than this one to help you. Paul says that we must avoid those who engage in lofty speech and worldly wisdom. What does that look like today? Pastors that engage in theatrics—they are more interested in entertaining you with jokes or stories than they are in making you holy. Or pastors who pay careful attention to their designer clothes and their designer watch and the designer set behind them, but who are not carefully handling the Word of God. Or pastors who try to forcefully grow their Church through worldly marketing techniques. This was one of the mistakes of the Young, Restless and Reformed movement of the last twenty years. Calvinism became the new trend, so they packaged their product and tried to capitalize on it.⁶

The anti-gospel gospels

But we should also be wary of those pulpits that proclaim Jesus Christ *merely* as a teacher, or example, or revolutionary. He is all of those things. But Paul presents Him *primarily* as our sin-satisfying, wrath-bearing, God-reconciling sacrifice. You see *merely* naming Jesus Christ doesn't mean one is avoiding lofty speech and worldly wisdom. The **word-of-faith gospel** *uses the name Jesus*, but their prize is health and wealth. The **moralistic gospel** *uses the name Jesus*, but their main message is 'improve your behavior.'⁷ **The therapeutic**

⁶ Or those pastors who are shaped by the surrounding culture. Do you remember what happened when Aaron was shaped by the demands of Israel in **Exodus 32**? When the people desired "...a calf to worship, a ministerial calf-maker [was] readily found." John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.,: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 55

⁷ Source: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-moralism-is-not-the-gospel-and-why-so-many-christians-think-it-is/> Accessed August 15, 2020

gospel *uses the name of Jesus*, but its main concern is that ‘God wants you to be happy.’ The **motivational gospel** *uses the name of Jesus*, and its goal is that you “get out there and be a champion for Christ!”⁸ Saying Jesus Christ is not enough. All these false gospels have one thing in common: they use lofty speech and worldly wisdom to conceal the truth. Paul tells the Corinthians, that is *not* how he proclaimed the testimony of God.

But didn’t Paul quote the philosophers?

So then positively, what are the *contents* of Paul’s preaching that proved it was authoritative? He says in **v.2** “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”⁹ Paul is describing the substance of his sermons—he only preaches Christ and him crucified. But this is confusing, because Paul himself quotes Greek philosophers which *seems to be* the very thing he is denying. Please turn with me to **Acts 17**. Here Paul arrives in Athens on his missionary journey and gets into a conversation **v.18**, with the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. They brought him to the Areopagus where all the philosophers gathered. He then stood up in **v.22** and said “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.” Paul then begins, and halfway through his message he quotes Greek philosophy! **v.28** “‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring.’ The first part of the verse comes from a man named Epimenides, and the second part from a poet named Aratus. To top it off, both of these lines were originally directed to

⁸ Kim Riddlebarger, *The Lectio Continua: Expository Commentary on the New Testament: First Corinthians*, (Powder Springs, GA.: Tolle Lege Press, 2013), pg. 53

⁹ This statement is clearly connected to his preaching. In **v.1** he denied the manner in which he preached, i.e. “in lofty speech and wisdom.” Here in **v.2** he affirms the manner in which he preached, i.e. “...nothing among you except Christ and him crucified.”

Zeus.¹⁰ Is Paul engaging in lofty speech here? Has he forgotten that he only preaches Christ and Him crucified? No. Paul is first showing them that they are living inconsistent with their own understanding of God. Why should they worship gold, silver and stone idols since that would deny who they actually believe God to be? He simply points that out. But then he reaches the climax of his sermon in v.30 “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” What did Paul preach *in* this sermon? Christ. He wasn’t engaging in lofty speech *merely* because he quoted from their philosophers. That’s not what he was rebuking in Corinth. He rebuked the type of preaching that reduced the gospel to a philosophical concept.¹¹ He rebuked the type of preaching that concealed the offense of the cross in lofty rhetoric.¹² That’s why he said “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”

But didn’t Paul preach other things?

But that brings us to another problem: didn’t Paul preach a lot of other things other than *just* Christ and Him crucified. Yes. Paul’s point is simply this, everything that He preaches finds its beginning, middle and end in Christ. This is how the NT presents every single truth. We preach Christ and Him crucified *not only* as our sin-bearing sacrifice.

We we also preach Christ as the reason to forgive one another: **Ephesians 4:32** “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, *as God in Christ forgave you.*”

¹⁰ Source: <https://carm.org/did-paul-quote-pagan-philosophers> Accessed August 15, 2020

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Paul also quoted the Greek playwright Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33 and the philosopher-poet Epimenides in Titus 1:12.

¹¹ “...the Logos assuming human nature.” Thomas Charles Edwards, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, (Published by Forgotten Books 2012, Originally Published 1885), pg. 46

¹² cf. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 38-40

We preach Christ to show the reason why marriage exists: **Ephesians 5:32** “This mystery [marriage] is profound, and I am saying that it refers *to Christ* and the church.

We preach Christ as the motive to give generously: **2 Corinthians 8:9** “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.”

We preach Christ as the explanation for why we suffer. **1 Peter 2:21** “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

We preach Christ as the antidote to sexism and racism: **Galatians 3:28** “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

There is no doctrine, no command, no ethic, no future hope, no present help in the entire NT that doesn't find all of its power but from Christ and Him crucified.¹³ That's why Paul's preaching was authoritative—because everything he preached was grounded in Christ. That's our **first point**. True preaching is the most authoritative speech on the planet because **1)** It is the testimony of God *Himself*; and **2)** Its content finds its beginning, middle, and end in Christ.

¹³ We preach...Christ as the reason we abstain from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:13); as an argument against drunkenness et. al. (1 Corinthians 6:9-11); as the ground of Church unity (1 Corinthians 1:13); as the confidence that all our needs will be met (Philippians 4:19); as the motivation for living holy lives (2 Peter 1:8); as our confidence when we sin (1 John 2:1-2); as the reason why children should obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1); as the prize that is waiting for us when we die (Philippians 1:21); as the motive for bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2); as the reason why we should take care with our weaker brothers (1 Corinthians 9:12); as the One who will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

II. The Agent of True Preaching

The marks of a true preacher

Who is the true agent—the true Person—of preaching? Paul again speaks negatively first, then positively. First *negatively*, **v.3** “And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.” Paul said he was weak. Weakness means that you lack the strength and capacity required to do what needs to be done. We probably don’t think of the apostle Paul like this at all. I think we tend to think of Paul as a super-Christian—a superhero who was stronger, better-looking and wittier than all his opponents. But actually “one ancient source (written about AD 160) recounts Paul’s appearance as follows: ‘A man small in stature, bald-headed, crooked in legs, healthy, with eyebrows joining, nose rather long.’”¹⁴ In terms of sophistication, Paul was not. He was weak in the eyes of the world. I think that is one way he is applying “weakness” to himself. But I think the primary way he is applying this term “weakness” to himself is because he realizes what the task of preaching is.¹⁵ Remember what the Puritan John Preston said? Whenever Christ crucified is preached it always has the effect of moving us closer to heaven or closer to hell.¹⁶ As Paul says in **2 Corinthians 2:15-16** “For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. *Who is sufficient for these things?*” Paul never felt sufficient. His message was one of salvation and damnation. Because of this, Paul came, as **v.3** says “...in *fear* and *much trembling*.” Paul pondered the magnitude of the message that God called him to preach, and it made him tremble. There is a mysterious dread that is felt by true gospel preachers of every age. Moses felt this fear. He told God in **Exodus 4:13**

¹⁴ Riddlebarger, pg. 48

¹⁵ “He had a work to do which he felt to be entirely above his powers” Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 31

¹⁶ The exact quote is: “There is not a sermon which is heard, but it sets us nearer heaven or hell.” *Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), pg. 95

“Oh, my Lord, please send someone else.” Jeremiah felt this fear. He said in **Jeremiah 1:6** “Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” All these men—Moses, Jeremiah, Paul and countless others—felt the weight of the message, precisely because it was God’s own words they carried. If a pulpit is marked by its levity—not by weakness, and fear and much trembling—I would question whether that man has been truly sent by the Lord to preach. So that’s Paul’s **negative description** of himself—weak, fearful and trembling. That’s the human agent in preaching.

Preaching: a ‘showing forth’ of the Spirit

Paul’s now moves on to the *positive* description: **v.4** “...my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, *but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.*” That is the true agent in authentic gospel preaching. It’s not the man, but the Spirit of God Himself. Paul’s **speech**—his λόγος *logos*—his content; *and* his **message**—his κήρυγμα *kērygma*—the actual preaching, were both a demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Paul wasn’t merely Paul when he preached. He was a living *demonstration* of the Holy Spirit. That word *demonstration* means a proof, a manifestation, a showing forth. That’s what all true preaching is: a showing forth of the Spirit of God. The Spirit of God is speaking through the preacher. How can we say that? Because this is how God always operates in true gospel preaching.

Preaching requires the filling of the Spirit

Consider John the Baptist. What do we read about him? **Luke 1:15-16** “...*he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God.*” How did he turn many in Israel to God? How was it that when he spoke, thousands were brought under powerful conviction? Because he was filled or anointed with the Holy Spirit in his preaching.

Consider our Lord Jesus Christ. He wasn’t exempt from this rule. When He got up to speak in the Synagogue in **Luke 4:18**, He turned explicitly to the

very passage in Isaiah which says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, *because* [Why is the Spirit upon Him? *Because*] he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.” Lloyd-Jones comments here “...even our Lord Himself, the Son of God, could not have exercised His ministry as a man on earth if he had not received this special, peculiar ‘anointing’ of the Holy Spirit to perform His task.”¹⁷

Or consider the Apostles. Why did Jesus tell them to wait in Jerusalem for a time before they began to preach? Because they first needed the Holy Spirit. **Acts 1:8** “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and [*then*] you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Isn’t that amazing? All the personal discipleship they received from Jesus, all the personal encounters they had with His miracles and the fact that they were eye-witnesses to His resurrection weren’t enough to equip them to be preachers. They needed something more. They needed the Spirit. And it was something that they needed again and again. The Spirit repeatedly filled them when they were called to preach. In Acts 4, Peter and John were arrested and were questioned regarding their illegal preaching. The Sanhedrin asked them in **v.7** “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Then we read this in **Acts 4:8** “Then Peter, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders...’” Now it would be foolish to interpret this to mean that the author just intended to remind us that the Peter had already been filled with the Spirit at Pentecost. No. He’s telling us this to indicate that a fresh filling of the Spirit had been given to Peter in order for him to preach. We see the same thing at the end of Acts 4 after they had been ordered to no longer preach in Jesus name. **Acts 4:31** “And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, *and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit* and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” What happened after they were filled? They spoke the word of God! One more example. In **Acts 13:9** when Paul was confronting a false prophet

¹⁷ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), pg. 307

called Bar-Jesus, we read “But Saul, who was also called Paul, *filled with the Holy Spirit*, looked intently at him and said...” Before Paul spoke a sentence, the Holy Spirit filled him. Amazing.

Principle: The Spirit of Christ is invisible present and operative in preaching

Here is the principle: The Spirit of Christ—the Holy Spirit—is invisibly present *and* operative in true gospel preaching. It’s not just that preaching is a demonstration or a *showing of the Spirit*. It is an event of supernatural *power*. Paul says in **v.4** “...my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of *power*.” This is the Biblical doctrine of preaching. **Colossians 1:28-29** “Him we proclaim [that is, we preach], warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, *struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me*.” Or **1 Thessalonians 1:5** “...our gospel came to you not only in word, *but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction*.”¹⁸ All three of these places teaches that preaching is done in the power—δύναμις dynamis—of the Spirit. We’ve seen this word already, it’s the word for dynamite. Back in **1:24** we saw that Christ is the power of God. Jesus is the dynamite or explosion of God on the earth. Here Paul is teaching that preaching is the power of the Holy Spirit. Preaching is the dynamite or explosion of the Holy Spirit on earth. “It is...this addition of the power of the Holy [Spirit] that ultimately makes preaching effective. This is what produces converts and creates Churches, and builds up [Christians]”¹⁹ the power—the dynamis—of the Holy Ghost. “The very existence of a growing church in Corinth proves Paul’s point.”²⁰ What accounts for this group of Christians in perhaps the most pagan city in the ancient world? Was it Paul’s weakness in

¹⁸ This was Peter’s doctrine of preaching as well: “It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you *by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven*, things into which angels long to look” (1 Peter 1:12)

¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 314

²⁰ Riddlebarger, pg. 46

speech and fear and trembling which created these Christians? No it was the presence and power of the Spirit in His preaching!

The Spirit still speaks today²¹

Dear congregation, the same Spirit that spoke through Paul's preaching speaks through all true gospel preaching today. How can I say that? Let me ask you one simple question: what if our preaching today *wasn't* a demonstration of the Spirit and power? What if the Spirit didn't attend to our preaching like He did with Paul's?²² Then our faith *would not* rest on the power of God but on the wisdom of man. But that is the very thing v.5 denies. The Holy Spirit *must be* present so that our faith can rest on the power of God alone. To deny that the Spirit of God is present and powerfully working in preaching today is to destroy the foundation of our faith.

Do we believe this?

Beloved, do you see how this doctrine instantly exposes us to what we really believe about the Lord's Day in general and preaching in particular? The idea that any one of us would miss the preaching of Christ and Him crucified in the presence of the saints is simply unfathomable. Of course there is sickness. Of course there are exceptional circumstances—this season of COVID has proven that. But the idea that any one of us would wake up in the morning and

²¹ **Objection:** "This "filling of the Spirit" was only reserved for the Apostolic period.

1st answer: Why would you make that assumption? Where does Scripture tell us that the Holy Spirit no longer empowers preaching like He did in the 1st century Church? 2,000 years of Church history has proven this false.

2nd answer: That means that our preaching today, devoid of the Spirit, cannot produce what God wants. If God wants our faith to rest on the power of God and not on the wisdom of men, then God is undermining Himself if He doesn't send the Holy Spirit in true gospel preaching. We are commanded by God to "Preach the Word"- 2 Timothy 4:1-2; are we to suppose that He will not provide His Holy Spirit in order to make the preaching effective? God forbid!

3rd answer: If success was granted to preaching that is not empowered by the Holy Spirit, then man would get the glory for that and not God the Holy Spirit.

²² Charles Spurgeon said: "The power that in the Gospel does not lie in the eloquence of the preacher, otherwise men would be the converters of souls, nor does it lie in the preacher's learning, otherwise it would consist in the wisdom of men. We might preach until our tongues rotted, till we would exhaust our lungs and die, but never a soul would be converted unless the Holy Spirit be with the Word of God to give it the power to convert the soul." MacArthur, pg. 57

ask: “are we going to Church today” simply shows that we don’t believe this passage. Beloved, do you believe what Paul says here? That the Holy Spirit of God speaks to us, is present among us, and exercises His infinite power among us *when Christ is preached*? Does your attendance on the Lord’s Day reflect that you believe it? Don’t you realize that if you “are not present at every service [you] may well find one day that [you] were not present when something really remarkable took place?”²³ It grieves me when we take this moment so lightly. We are telling the Lord that there are better things than His presence, better voices than His voice, better joys than the joy He brings.²⁴

What if I don’t “feel” the Spirit?

Perhaps you might ask: If the Holy Spirit is present when Christ is preached, then why don’t we always “feel” it? Several answers. **First**, do you always “feel” the strength that food is giving you? Of course not. But don’t you feel it sometimes, especially when you are hungry for it? Does a lack of “feeling” prove the food is not powerfully working in you?

Secondly, perhaps you don’t feel the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit because of your own unbelief. In Matthew 13 Jesus came to His hometown, and He was despised by the townspeople because they were familiar with Him. They asked “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” Their familiarity with Him drove them to disbelief, and as a result **v.58** says “[Jesus] did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.” Perhaps you have stopped “feeling” the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in preaching because you have become too “familiar.” You see this *merely* as a human gathering. “Is not this just the ordinary preacher with ordinary words?” No it’s not. If you think like that, you are not expecting to meet with God. This is why we are expressly told by Jesus Himself to be careful how we listen. **Mark 4:24** “If anyone has

²³ Lloyd-Jones, pg. 153

²⁴ Leland Ryken recounts how in Puritan times people in London were “ready and willing to run many miles to hear sermons when they have them not at home, and lay aside all care of profit, leaving their labor and work on weekdays to frequent public meetings for prophecy and expounding of God’s word.” Ryken, pg. 94

ears to hear, let him hear....Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you.” In other words, if you measure this event to be a very little thing, you will receive very little from it.²⁵ But if you the “...hearer embraces the message of Jesus...in a rich and profound way, then still more will be added to you.” The Spirit of “... God will take up residence in [your] heart and give [you] increased understanding and blessing, both in this age and the age to come.”²⁶

Thirdly, perhaps you don't feel this power of the Spirit during preaching because your hearts is hardened with sin. **Hebrews 4:7** “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” Our hearts become hardened to God because of the deceitfulness of sin (**Hebrews 3:13**). Beloved if you are caught in a secret sin, and it has become habitual to you, no wonder why you don't “feel” the power of the Spirit in preaching. Your heart has become callous. Haven't you ever felt a working man's hands? They are all calloused. The body builds up those callouses in order to make their hands insensitive to their labors. When you continue in unrepentant sin, your heart becomes callous and insensitive to the Spirit. Other people around you can hear His voice, but you have become deaf to it. What's the solution? James tells us in **James 4:8** “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”

That's our **second point**. The ultimate agent in true gospel preaching is not man. Man is weak, and fearful and trembling. It is the Holy Spirit of God, and He comes in power. Let us not be worldly like the Corinthians were. Let us believe that we are receiving the message from God Himself

²⁵ cf. Matthew 7:2 and Luke 6:38 to see more of this principle of “the measure you use...”

²⁶ *The ESV Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL.,: Crossway, 2008), pg. 1900

III. The Aim of True Preaching

The glorification of God

What is God's aim in preaching? No doubt we could answer that a number of ways. God's *main aim* in preaching is so that He would be glorified. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 4:5** "For what we *proclaim* [preach] is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord..." Why? So that, **v.6**, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" would shine in our hearts. Preaching exists so that God's glory would be seen by men. But that is not God's express goal in this passage.

My faith has found a resting place

Please look at **v.5**. Why did God design true preaching to be a 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." What was the Corinthian problem? As they boasted in man, their faith began to rest on the wisdom of man. And as a result they grew weak in their faith and fleshly. Paul tells them in **3:1** "...brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ." Every problem that we are going to see in the rest of this letter, can be traced back to this. Many of the Corinthians became fleshly and sinned in remarkable ways. Why? Because the faith rested on the mere wisdom of their favorite teacher. Their faith rested on the wisdom of men. Paul now trots out the true nature of preaching so that their faith would find a different resting place. And oh how we need to apply Paul's logic today.

"But especially the preaching of the Word"

Dear congregation, to hear Christ preached in a demonstration of the Spirit and of power is the surest, strongest, most satisfying place for your faith to find rest. How can I say that? Isn't personal reading and study an *equally* good place to have your faith built up? No. Personal reading can build up your faith. Personal reading is good. All of us should engage in it regularly. But it is not

equal to true preaching. Where in the Bible do you find a statements like we've seen about personal reading? Listen to how the Shorter catechism puts it:

Q. 89. How is the Word of God made effective to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading *but especially the preaching of the Word*, an effective means of convincing and converting sinners, and building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, to salvation.

And this is the testimony of Scripture. Where is faith most effectively created, and sustained and built up? During the preaching of the word. When Ezra got up to preach to Israel after her captivity, the Spirit of God moved on him so powerfully that when he began to preach they were weeping, but when he finished, it says in **Nehemiah 8:12** "...all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them." Their faith found rest on the power of God. When Jonah preached to the Ninevites, the most ruthless, heartless, cruel people on earth, the Spirit of God moved so powerfully that the king removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and ashes and sent out a proclamation for the people to fast and call out mightily to God and to turn from their evil ways.²⁷ The greatest revival in the OT came from preaching. Their faith was established by the power of God. Or think about Pentecost. What moved over 3,000 souls to embrace Jesus Christ as their Savior, when only a few days earlier they were crying out "Crucify Him?" The Holy Spirit preaching through a fisherman known as Peter. Faith was created, hearts were comforted through the power of God in preaching.

Where is your faith resting?

Why is this important to emphasize? Because God wants your faith to *rest* on His power. Is your faith at rest beloved? Don't you see how God provides for your greatest needs in this event? What do you need most? You need the

²⁷ Jonah 2:6-9

Holy Spirit to speak to your heart that though you are more sinful than you can imagine, God loves you more in Christ than you could ever imagine. You need the Holy Spirit to convince your heart that:

the blood of Jesus is your peace
 the righteousness of Jesus is your strength
 the condemnation of Jesus is your freedom
 the death of Jesus is your life
 the resurrection of Jesus is your glory

Beloved those are the truths that will turn lambs into lions. That is why we need a demonstration the Spirit and power. And God has given this to us graciously whenever Christ and Him crucified is preached.

How then should we listen?

How then should we listen to this Spirit empowered preaching so that we can get the most out of it? Five quick practices on how to listen for the Spirit. **First** prepare yourself for the Lord's Day. If you knew that you were going to speak to the President of the United States, would you not prepare yourself for that conversation? The Spirit of God is going to speak to you every Lord's Day, how should you prepare for that on Saturday? **Second**, consider taking notes. If this is the main spiritual feast of every week, it seems that writing a few things down would aid you remember what the Holy Spirit is saying to you. **Third**, meditate on what you have heard throughout the week. Edmund Calamy once said several hundred years ago that sermons were like food on the table: "you must eat it; and not only eat it...but digest it...one sermon well digest, well meditated upon, is better than twenty sermons without meditation."²⁸ **Fourth**, consider the Puritan practice of repeating the sermon. Talk to your friends and family about what you heard, try to enunciate the points yourself. Then ask them what they heard, what particularly struck them, what built them up,

²⁸ Ryken, pg. 103

encouraged them, convicted them. **Fifthly**, learn to ask the right questions. Instead of listening like the Corinthians—they listened to be amused or entertained, or to simply find something useful for their lives—“we must learn to ask this: ‘were the riches and treasures of Jesus Christ on display, and was his death and resurrection proclaimed as the ultimate means of dealing with the human condition?’”²⁹

What are you resting in?

If you are here this morning and you have not trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are without excuse. You have just heard the Holy Spirit of God speak through His Word. Will you continue to resist the Lord? What is your faith resting in? Hasn't 2020 demonstrated to you that your life is out of control. You can't trust in money, or your health, or in politics. Everything is uncertain. Except for one thing my friend. You are a sinner, and God is holy and one day you will stand before Him to be judged. Flee to Jesus today. Escape the wrath to come. Jesus says that if you turn to Him, trust in Him, repent of your unbelief, that He will forgive a sinner like you. “The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (**Romans 6:23**).

²⁹ Riddlebarger, pg. 52. For further points of application, see pg. 57-59