

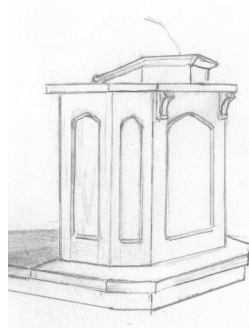
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Ephesian elders in Acts: “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 27:20). Paul boldly defines and defends his own ministry as not “shrinking back”. That is, he did not avoid or hold back from his apostolic calling to declare the counsel of God. And not just part of God’s word; no, the “whole” counsel. In the words of Matthew Henry, “He had preached to them nothing but the counsel of God, and had not added any inventions of his own; “it was pure gospel, and nothing else, the will of God concerning your salvation.” The gospel is the counsel of God; it is admirably contrived by his wisdom, it is unalterably determined by his will, and it is kindly designed by his grace for our glory.”

As preachers, we can attest that we have in and of ourselves nothing to offer weary and wandering sheep. And if we were ever naïve enough to show up at a new church thinking we had it going on, then a decade of weekly preaching is more than enough of a reality check! But if a decade of preaching makes me realize just how much I must decrease, then the opposite is even truer: he must increase. The joy of expository preaching is not merely that I always know what I am preaching next week (though that is nice); the joy of expository preaching is preaching Christ from all of Scripture. In God’s word, Jesus is held out to us for the taking.

The Sacred Desk

By Rev. Sean McCann



What is your favorite book of the Bible? Christians often ask this question of each other, and some common answers include Genesis, John, Psalms, James, and Romans. Another common question is our favorite verse, with answers including John 3:16, Romans 8:28, Joshua 1:9, and Philippians 4:13. But have you ever been asked your favorite chapter in the Bible? Maybe your mind goes to Genesis 1 (creation), Isaiah 53 (the suffering servant), John 15 (the vine and the branches), 1 Corinthians 13 (love), or Hebrews 11 (the “faith hall of fame”). All those are great chapters, but the most common answer to our favorite chapter would have to be the 8th chapter of the book of Romans. In Dr. Derek Thomas’ wonderful book on Romans 8, *How the Gospel Brings Us All the Way Home*, he calls it simply “the best chapter in the Bible.” Romans 8 stands out both for its content, and its context – i.e., where it fits in the overall book of Romans.

The chapter begins with a common favorite verse: “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,” and ends with the glorious assurance that nothing “shall separate us from the love of Christ.” In between we have the comforting reassurance of our adoption (v15), the encouragement to hope in what we do not see (v25), and the unparalleled v28: “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for our good.”

Of course, the glories of this chapter do not appear in a vacuum but rather come as the crowning culmination of an argument started way back in 1:16–17. In these intervening chapters, Paul has proven humanity’s lack of righteousness and need of a savior (1:18–3:20), the provision of that righteousness in Jesus Christ (3:21–4:25), and the resulting hope that we are now in Christ and therefore freed from the power of sin (5–8), for justification by faith frees us from sin to live with the hope of glory. We are freed from sin’s penalty and power, from the condemnation for breaking the law and the obligation of keeping it unto salvation.

In chapter 8, Paul adds to the list by proclaiming how we are not only free from sin, and not only free from the law, but we are free from death itself. Here – in the face of the realities of suffering and death – is where chapter 8 earns its favored status. From the groaning of creation to the suffering of tribulation to the taking of life itself, Paul never shies away from the hardships of this life. But it is amid those hardships that the grace of God and the hope of the gospel shine so brightly. Hope prevails, for “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (v37).

God indeed has been good to us, and we have every reason to expect that he will continue to be good to us in the future. For your part, never tire of hearing God’s word. And for my part, I intend – by God’s grace – to never tire of preaching God’s word. My big-game hunting days are not over; I have some big “white whale” books out there waiting to be preached like Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Luke, Galatians, and Revelation. It is my hope and prayer that our time together will continue to be marked by the repeated refrain in the book of Acts: “But the word of God increased and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

I have shared this quote many times, but I have no shame in closing with it once again, for it has inspired, grounded, and given me hope and confidence in the Lord’s faithfulness, and not my own. Martin Luther, reflecting on the Reformation, wrote: “I simply taught, preached, and wrote God’s Word; otherwise I did nothing. And while I slept, or drank Wittenberg beer with my friends Philip and Amsdorf, the Word so greatly weakened the papacy that no prince or emperor ever inflicted such losses upon it. I did nothing; the Word did everything.”

Preaching Schedule		
Date	Morning	Evening
May 3	Romans 8:12-17	
May 10	Romans 8:18-25	2 Kings 6:24-7:20
May 17	Romans 8:26-30	2 Kings 8
May 24	Romans 8:31-38	2 Kings 9
May 31	Romans 9:1-13	2 Kings 10
June 7	Romans 9:14-18	
June 14	Romans 9:19-29	2 Kings 11
June 21	Romans 9:30-10:4	2 Kings 12
June 28	Romans 10:5-13	2 Kings 13

Speak The Word

By Rev. Jim Curtis

Recently, we wrapped up a series in Sunday school called “The Words to Speak.” I chose that title because I wanted to address the primary fear of interacting with others about our faith in Jesus: *what will I say?* Not having “The Words to Speak” so often trips us up before we even get in the same room as the other person! So, we tackled some common objections head on. One key principle never made its way to the forefront, though, which is a basic premise the Bible gives us: *Let God speak for himself!*

As much as I hope that Sunday school series was helpful, I would urge us to dial in on this basic premise prior to doing any further research on syllogisms, fallacies, and other worldviews and religions. In short, we prepare for these conversations with our families, friends, and neighbors best when we are regularly in the word of God. Because this does not feel like preparation for objections, it can feel like jumping out of an airplane without a parachute. Let me suggest three brief reasons why Bible reading is the *best* preparation for these encounters:

First, the Bible focuses us on God rather than ourselves. In reading the Bible, we read of our sin and God’s majestic work of redemption. This prepares our hearts with humility. We can enter into the conversations without the burden of selfishness—like the desire to win the argument, shame the opposition, and get applause for our persuasive prowess. When we approach conversations from the perspective of elevating self, we distract the conversation from Jesus, instead of letting him do the work of offending their flesh and renewing their hearts. In ourselves, we only know how to offend. Reading our Bibles prepares us by building our confidence in Christ’s work of regeneration—giving new life to receive the Gospel gladly. Only he can do that.

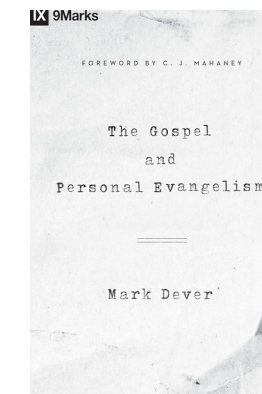
Second, the Bible focuses us on the person in front of us. Rather than turning us inward, the Bible’s call is for us to deny ourselves, follow Christ, and tell our neighbors. The Bible, then, prepares us by revealing Jesus’ love for the person in front of us! This reshapes our perspective wholesale. Suddenly, that person becomes someone we are *pleading with* to come to know Jesus. This is powerful persuasion; rather than having all the right and perfect answers, passionately begging others to believe you so that they would know the glories of knowing and having Christ.

Finally, and perhaps most obviously, the Bible *gives us the words to say!* This is true not only practically, in that you will be familiar with the cohesion of all the parts of the Bible and so able to defend it from objections. But also spiritually, in that a deep familiarity with the Bible prepares us with the eternal word, which is able to destroy lofty arguments. The Spirit is pleased to use even just the reading of the word to save people!

Again, I do hope the series was of great benefit to all. But without reading the Bible, we lose the love of God for us in promising to do the work, and we lose the love of God for the person before us. Indeed, you may have all the best arguments and replies in the world, but if you have not love... Well, I suspect you know the rest.

The Gospel and Personal Evangelism

By Micaiah Liner



“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” Romans 1:16

As I have passed the church book table over the past few months, I have seen a variety of books that have piqued my interest. And if I am being honest, *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, has not been one of them. That is because the topic of evangelism is often a challenging

one. Yes, even for a pastoral intern enrolled in seminary. And yet, I know I am not alone in this struggle. If you are like me, the idea of sharing the gospel can produce feelings of anxiety. And then when opportunities are missed, no doubt, feelings of shame are never too far behind. But the truth is (and it is a wonderful truth!) that God has chosen you and me to spread the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In *The Gospel and Personal Evangelism*, pastor Mark Dever does an excellent job of writing about a topic which many Christians can approach with a degree of fear and trepidation, and perhaps even guilt. In a very short book (less than 120 pages), he covers a surprising amount of territory, answering questions such as Why don’t we evangelize?, What is the gospel?, and Why should we evangelize?

One chapter I found particularly helpful is titled “How Should We Evangelize?” Here, Dever gives three vital parts of any gospel presentation: honesty, urgency, and joy. He suggests that each of these elements are essential when sharing the gospel.

Evangelizing with honesty means that we share with people the true condition (indeed, the true danger) they are in without Christ. This means that people need to hear that they are sinners; they must know that because God is good, he will not allow evil and sin to continue forever, which means his judgement is coming. This naturally leads to a sense of urgency—not pressure, or emotional manipulation. But people must also know that the stakes could not be higher. These are issues of life and death and eternity. Finally, Dever drives home the significance of evangelism to also include the joy that salvation brings. Not only is there deliverance from the wrath of God for all who believe, but there is also life everlasting. There is fullness of life with God. Nothing could be more wonderful than that!

Wherever you find yourself when it comes to personal evangelism, I encourage you to pick up this short book. You will be encouraged. See how God might use it to help reinvigorate in you a heart for reaching the lost with the only message that can save. The gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. May we more and more see this power on display as we share the good news with those around us.

THE SALTSHAKER

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Just Getting Started

By Rev. Sean McCann

This month marks my 10th anniversary at CRPC, and it has made me a bit reflective. My kids have grown up here and will forever call Asheville home. I cut my teeth here as a first-time senior pastor, and now I am one of the longer tenured teaching elders in the Presbytery. We have together endured pastoral transitions (both sweet and bitter), a global pandemic, and a devastating hurricane. We have seen officers and members come and go, covenant children arrive, missionaries and interns sent out, and faithful saints pass into glory. Through it all, the Lord has been kind and merciful to us, and I can look back over the decade with a deep sense of gratitude for what the Lord has done by his word and Spirit.

I preached my first sermon on May 22, 2016, and was installed as pastor the following Sunday. My text for that first sermon was Zechariah 4:6: “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” In that message, I called the congregation (and myself) to trust in the sufficiency of God’s Spirit working in his word: “The powers of this world will keep telling us to do things their way, and to look to an endless supply of man-centered church growth strategies. The new pastor’s honeymoon period will wear off, and the people of God will become discouraged and frustrated. But keep trusting God and do not despise the day of small things.” With those words, I put my cards on the table and stated clearly that the entire thrust of our ministry together would be calling on the Spirit of the Lord to work in and through his word.

That was our commitment from day one, and I am so glad to see that now ten years later, we hold to that vision as strong as ever. As a congregation, you love the word of God, and it is our joy as pastors to bring it to you every week. Like the Bereans, you receive “the word with all eagerness” (Acts 17:11). And like the Thessalonians, “when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in your believers” (1 Thess 2:13). You would never endure for long the cotton candy fluff that comes from so many modern pulpits; rather you demand

of us the meat-and-potatoes of God’s word, in season and out. Do not underestimate the role of the faithful congregation holding her preachers accountable to their calling.

For my part, this vision has meant a commitment to preach God’s word, and, in particular, to preach sequential, expository sermon series through books of the Bible. Indulge me for a moment as I reflect on a decade’s worth of sermons at our church. In that first year, I preached brief series in Philippians (4 chapters), Jonah (4), and the opening chapters of Revelation (3). From there, we turned to longer books like Exodus (40) and Acts (28), interspersed with shorter books like Titus (3), Haggai (2), the Psalms of Ascents (15 psalms), Amos (9), and Ephesians (6). After we survived COVID and my fifth anniversary, I began “big game hunting” by tackling hefty books like Genesis (50), Matthew (28), Isaiah (66), and now Romans (16). During my sabbatical, Pastor Jim preached Esther (10), and last year we added 1 Peter (5) and Ecclesiastes (12) to the list. During that same period of time, we have had a team of pastors and interns work through the following books on Sunday evenings: John (21), 1 Samuel (31), 1–3 John (7), Lamentations (5), 1 Corinthians (16), 2 Samuel (24), Hosea (14), Proverbs (the first 9 chapters), Hebrews (13), Songs in the Night (7 psalms), 2 Peter (3), and 1 Kings (22). Not counting the occasional topical and seasonal series, that amounts to preaching 473 chapters, which, out of the total number of chapters in the Bible of 1,189, comes out to 40%. Add to that the additional twenty-six books we have read through in morning and evening worship, and the psalms we have studied on Wednesday nights (we are halfway into our second pass through the Psalter), and the total percentage ticks up to over 50%. At this rate, if the Lord tarries and you can endure me for twice as long, we might just cover the whole Bible by the end of our second decade together!

Why is this important, besides the fact that I like to keep records and track numbers? The words of Paul come to mind, spoken at his emotional farewell to the

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May–June

Upcoming Events

For additional information about any of these events, please refer to our website (covenantreformed.net), or contact the church office at 828-253-6578; office@covenantreformed.net.

The Lord’s Supper

Please prepare your hearts in advance to take of the sacrament together.

Morning Worship:
May 3, 17, June 7, 21

Evening Worship
May 31

Shepherding Groups
June 7

Summer Picnic
June 17

Men’s Second Breakfast
May 9, June 13

Weekly Events

Sunday:
Sunday School 9:30 am
Morning Worship 10:45 am
Evening Worship 6:00 pm Except on 1st Sunday

Wednesday Nights 6:00 pm Ends May 20

Bible Study

For Men:
ROMEOS 7:30 am Every Thursday
(Retired Old Men Eating Out)
at Cornerstone Restaurant
Norm Bomer’s Home 7:00 pm 1st & 3rd Thursdays

For Women:
Carol Esther Belz’s Home 9:30 am Every Tuesday

Watering Seeds Podcast

Be sure to check out our church’s weekly podcast, *Watering Seeds*. Each week our pastors review, discuss, and apply the previous Sunday’s sermon. You can find the podcast on any major podcast platform, such as Anchor, Spotify, or Apple Podcast, by searching for our church name or the title, “Watering Seeds,” or by scanning the following QR code:

