



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 2:1–5

1 Corinthians

“The Apostolic Message”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, I think it's time for us to begin. According to my watch, it's very close to 7:30. Let's open with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn again to Thee with appreciation. It's an appreciation again for the opportunity of opening the Scriptures and considering them in a gathering such as this. And we ask, Lord, that the Holy Spirit may again teach us the Word of God. We pray that we may be responsive, that our ears, the ears of our hearts may be opened, and that the things that are said may be not only useful to us as we think about our faith, but also useful for us as we seek to be conformed in our lives to the faith that we have affirmed.

We thank Thee for the gift of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for a crucified Messiah, which obviously meant so much to the early church and should mean so much to us here 1900-plus years later. We thank Thee for the confidence we have as we turn to the Word of God that we are turning to the inspired Word of God. And we thank Thee that amid all of the changeable affirmations of truth in our day, there is one unchangeable rock, and that rock is the Word of God, the word of the prophets, the apostles, and, above all, the word of our Lord Jesus Christ which has confirmed the Old Testament word and also, in the appointment of his apostles, confirmed the New Testament revelation as well.

We are certainly blessed to have the Word of God in our hands available for all, Lord. May we be responsive to it. We commit our evening service to Thee and ask Thy blessing upon it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, we’re turning this evening to one of the great passages of the New Testament, one upon which I have spoken before in Believers Chapel, but the last day or so I’ve been thinking about it again and trying to think of some things that might be useful to say this time.

The subject is “The Apostolic Message.” Our Lord’s minister—that is, the man who stands up to proclaim the Word of God in the Sunday school, in the church services, or in his discussions about Christianity with his friends—should never stray far from the basics.

And in authentic Christianity, the basic is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s the foundation. It’s the criterion of the faith, although the sheer oddness of it may make it seem to some a kind of disaster. One of the taunts of the early opponents of Christianity was that Christians worshipped *homo noxens et cruceus*; that is, “a criminal man and his cross.” That’s what they were saying and they were saying all over the ancient world. In the 2nd century there was a Roman graffito, which was pictured with a head of an ass, and then a man underneath bowing over before a crucifixion scene, a crucified man. And underneath were the words, *Alexamenos sabete theon*: “Alexander, worships God.” And so it seemed so stupid to them, those that did not understand, for individuals to worship someone who had been crucified.

Justin Martyr, in the 2nd century, one of the defenders, one of the greatest of the defenders of Christianity in the 2nd century, recorded, “The offense that was caused to the sophisticated citizens of Alexandria and elsewhere by the madness,” as he put it, “of the Christian proclamation of a crucified Christ.” It reminds me of Ted Turner’s statement that “All Christians are losers.” That’s essentially what they were saying when the crucified Christ was mentioned. All Christians are stupid. They’re losers.

But for the apostles, the ancient tree was the point of reference, not only here but in Galatians chapter 3 in verse 1, a passage that we’ll refer to in a moment, the Apostle Paul states that

the heart of the message that he proclaimed was a crucified Messiah. So for them, what the world regarded as madness, they regarded as the fundamental thing of the Christian faith. It was reflected in the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper, especially as we think of the Lord’s Supper, verily called in the Old Testament communion, the Lord’s Supper, in the Roman Catholic Church called the Mass, or the Eucharist. In the Christian churches also the term Eucharist was used; thanksgiving, the thanksgiving; the Holy Communion.

This ceremony commemorates and reenacts and recalls to memory the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the benefits brought believers by what he has done. He is not worshiped as a dead rabbi of the past, as someone has said, but he is worshiped as a risen, exalted living Lord.

If you think about these things, I think you can understand why Martin Luther said that the cross is all or the cross alone is our theology. Looking around for a powerful statement of that fact here in 1 Corinthians, chapter 2, verse 1 through verse 5, our text for the night, is probably the most significant statement of it. I’m going to read it now and beginning at verse 1, the apostle says,

“And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.

For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.

And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,

That our faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”

Evidently the apostle, as we’ve been saying in 1 Corinthians, was combating a form of triumphalism that existed in Corinth, a triumphalism of wisdom, the kind of wisdom that it was said belonged only to the bright people. And so consequently wisdom, highly regarded in the Greek

world, ran head-on into the Christian faith, because that’s precisely what the early Christians called their truth, only they spoke of it as the wisdom of God. So the apostle is now going to speak directly to it in chapter 2. The message is stated for us in verse 1 and verse 2. The Christian gospel is not worldly wisdom grounded in man’s fallen reason.

He says, and when I came to you, in harmony with the principles of God’s authoritative word, in harmony with rhetoric philosophy, psychology—no, they were not his mentors, but in harmony with the principles of God’s—of God’s authoritative Word, the apostle comes.

Now, as for him, a kind of scholarly neutrality never existed. One was either for God or not for God. That, I’m persuaded, is essentially the truth of the matter philosophically: we’re either for God or we are against him. But when he came to them, Paul had made up his mind, as Alister McGrath has said, “That Christ’s pulpit would be his cross.”

Now, the message that he proclaimed, he calls Jesus Christ in him crucified. That’s a kind of oxymoron. The idea of a Messiah crucified would have been regarded as a contradiction by those who listened to him from among the Jewish people and those influenced by them.

And, remember, when he came to Corinth, he spoke in the synagogue until finally was forced out. So speaking of a crucified Messiah would be contrary to everything that they thought that the Messiah was going to be. Because they thought of the Messiah as a conquering, brilliant individual who would come, who would, by the fact of God’s divine power behind him, overthrow the Romans, the secular authority and establish again the kingdom of Israel in the earth. That was their idea of the Messiah.

As a matter of fact, when the Christians began to point out that in the Old Testament the Scriptures themselves speak of a suffering Messiah, then they invented an answer to it. And the invention was one that they thought they would be able to get away with. And it was simply this: Evidently there are two Messiahs; one of them—and they went on to speak of these two Messiahs as one—Messiah Ben Joseph and the other Messiah David or Messiah, the son of Joseph, Messiah, the son of David. One of them would be a suffering Messiah and the other being—would be a glorified

Messiah. And in that way would be harmonized the two sets of Old Testament prophecies that spoke of a suffering Messiah and of a glorified Messiah.

Remember the Lord Jesus spoke to the men on the Emmaus Road and said to them, “Oh, fools and sloth heart to believe all that the prophets have written, ought not Messiah to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory?”

So that, to them, was one of the great problems of the preaching of the Word. In Acts chapter 26 in verse 23 when the apostle appears before King Agrippa the question comes up. And Paul says, “Therefore, having obtained help from God to this day, I stand witnessing both to small and great saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come, that the Messiah would suffer, and that he would be the first to rise from the dead and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.

So he was busy explaining in his messages how it should be that the Scriptures spoke both of a glorified Messiah, a mighty, conquering Messiah, and also a suffering Messiah. And he found the harmonization of it in the ministry of Jesus Christ who was a suffering Messiah and in his resurrection God set him forth as Lord of all.

Now, why is a suffering Messiah the wisdom of God? Why? Is it really true that a suffering Messiah is the wisdom of God? Well, let me suggest, first of all, that what the suffering Messiah doctrine, what our suffering Messianic person, our Lord Jesus Christ, what he signifies in his ministry is very pointedly put forth by the crucifixion. This is as someone has said, no genial icon, the cross. It's a symbol of the wreckage of human—let me use the word we so like to use today—of our human self-esteem.

When we look at the cross, we see the wreckage of human pride. Well, that's really what self-esteem is. We learn through the cross of Jesus Christ that, though we are in the image of God by creation, we learn of our sin, we learn of our guilt, we learn of our lostness. We learn that our debt to God in heaven is an infinity debt.

The Apostle Peter on the Day of Pentecost speaks about it when he writes in chapter 2 when he speaks, which is recorded in chapter 2 of the book of Acts verse 22 and 23, “Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through him in his midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.” It goes on to say, he was raised from the dead. But you by wicked, lawless hands have put him to death. So the crucifixion, first of all, tells us what we are as individuals. We are sinners. We are under a divine judgment. Because of our guilt, we are lost. Our debt is infinite, for it’s an eternal death.

That is part of the wisdom of the cross, but that’s not all. It’s a word regarding the world itself. In verse 23 of chapter 1 he had said, “but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.”

Wisdom, the wisdom of the world, saw him dying helplessly, shabbily, as an abandoned criminal. But God, by resurrection, reversed its judgment. It sees Good Friday only, but the Scriptures lay the stress on Easter day.

When we think of the sufferings of Christ and the things that are represented by that, we really should enter into it that way. Good Friday is significant. But if we lay stress on Good Friday and forget the first day of the week, when Jesus rose from the dead, the story is incomplete; for on that day, God made it plain to us that he accepted the work that Jesus Christ had done. And in raising him from the dead, acknowledged him. Heaven acknowledged him as the Lord of all.

So it’s a word concerning us individually. It’s a word concerning the world itself, the world is under divine judgment. I guess it’s a word for those who love Murphy Brown, too. It’s a word that lies back of what Dan Quayle was saying, but he couldn’t express it. [Laughter] I’m not saying that he couldn’t if I sat down with him, but he didn’t express it.

We know now, and tell it not in Gath, publish did not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised hear, but our president is finally beginning to get the message. It’s now become politically good to

talk about family values. It's true. As a magazine a few—a month or so after the election with the article, Dan Quayle was right. He was right. And the president is seeking to gather behind the truth of that some political momentum. It's rather shabby of course. I don't hear him saying Dan Quayle was right, do you? He won't say that. It's obvious to everybody. Dan Quayle was right. Family values are important, but he won't say it, but he will say family values are important. But we know, at least I know—I don't know about you—but Dan Quayle was right.

Sin has really affected our society in such a way that anyone who looks at our society would have to agree that the cross of Jesus Christ is a word concerning our world. We are sinners, and we need the truth of Holy Scripture. I think Dan Quayle said Hollywood just does not get it. But the fact is, the world just does not get it, the truth of the cross of Christ. But there is a body of people who do, and it is the church of Jesus Christ.

There is another thing I think that this tells us, and that is the crucified Messiah is a word regarding our God, because it speaks of divine grace and salvation. If we look at it from the standpoint of God, the only way by which we can get his elected people into his presence is by providing a sacrifice for them, providing someone who will pay their debt, enabling him in righteousness to bring them into heaven as the family of God.

And so, consequently, the crucified Messiah is a marvelous work to us because it tells us that we could not gain heaven of ourselves, God can bring us there by virtue of what Christ has done. And so he dies for our sins. He dies for sinners and makes it possible for his divine plan to come to its beautiful fruition in one day, the church of God, the people of God being in his presence.

Those whom he has loved from everlasting, so the Scriptures tell us. That's a marvelous term. I may have time to speak about that later on, but we will drop it for the moment. It is a word regarding God, divine grace and salvation, as he expressed it over here in verse 18, for the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

And in verse 30, but of him, you are in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God. God’s wisdom. What is that? Righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. Those words that we discussed last week. This genuine self-esteem. This is what a Christian—this is where a Christian finds his self-esteem. He finds his self-esteem not in human pride. He finds his self-esteem not in psychological—psychologically generated pride. He finds his self-esteem in what Paul is talking about when he says justification, sanctification, and the redemption of the body brought into the presence of the Lord. Those are the things in which we glory, and they are things that are gifts to us. And so, consequently, we have no basis whatsoever for pride of ourselves. Our pride rests in what he has done for us.

And this, of course, is the marvelous grace that is grounded in eternal love. Unchangeable. If the love of God is eternal, if it’s everlasting, then it existed before you and I ever came into existence. Is that not true? Of course it’s true. If it’s everlasting, it existed before we ever came into existence. Any—any possible thing that we should do in our existence can never effect everlasting love. It exists before we ever have come into existence, before we have a chance to do anything or think anything. And it exists on long after our time here on this earth. It’s everlasting love. And, furthermore, since it’s everlasting love, it’s invincible love. Nothing can defeat the eternal love of God for the children of God. Nothing. It is invincible. It’s the divine purpose to bring you and me, if we belong to him, to heaven. There isn’t anything in this world or out of this world, no devil can prevent God’s purpose from coming to pass. It’s his eternal purpose, so Scriptures say.

So those marvelous texts I think of Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 4 and verse 7 and 2 Timothy chapter 1 in verse 9, just in case there may be someone who is not thinking of those verses when I speak about eternal invincible love, well, let me read one of them, 2 Timothy 1:9. The apostle speaks about “the power of God who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,” *before* time began.

So he has revealed himself in the Word of God as a God who loves invincibly, eternally. And the focus of his love is the cross of Jesus Christ by which he has made it possible for him to fulfill all the aspects of his purpose. If we want to know what God means, we don't ask philosophers. We don't ask psychologists. We don't ask the man of the street. We don't even ask the gods of the false religions. We turn to the Scriptures, and we ask, “What do the Scriptures say we are to understand by the term “God”?” The God of the Scriptures. This is what the apostles and prophets proclaim. As far as reason is concerned, human reason, its competency is ultimately destroyed by divine revelation. And that's what we have in God's holy Word. If we want to know what God means, we turn to the Scriptures.

Luther made a marvelous, typical kind of statement for Luther because he expressed often in figures that you could understand so easily. He said, “Scripture is the manger in which Christ is laid.” It's the manger in which Christ is laid.

And so if we want to know our Lord, he's found right here in Scripture. We should have gained that if we read the Bible. We will talk about reading the Bible. Last year was for reading the Bible. This year, well, I hope you're continuing. I must say, I haven't started reading through from Genesis yet, but I still recommend it.

In Scripture is where we find the truths of Christ crucified. And one of the things that impresses any reader of the Bible is this: That when you read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, one of the rather interesting things about those books is that it seems as if there is an extraordinarily large amount of space relatively devoted to the events surrounding the suffering and death of our Lord.

In fact, one scholar stated this. Probably it's an overemphasis. He stated that the gospels were really something like—well, introductions to the crucifix—to the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus Christ. For in the ministry of 30 years or so, we have an inordinately large amount of space devoted to the Passion. You will note that in the Gospel accounts. So the Passion was obviously primarily upon the mind of the authors of those Gospels. They wanted to be sure and set that forth, and so they devoted so much time to it. The Gospels, are Passion narratives, someone has

suggested. Well, that may or may not be true. The person I was thinking about—I couldn’t think of the word at the moment—he has called the Gospels, passion narratives with extended introductions. But that shows the importance of the Passion, the death and sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ in that man’s mind.

So Paul says, I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is the thing that dominated the apostle.

Now, in verse 3 and verse 4, he talks about his method. He was moved by the confidence in God’s message, and he rested everything in the ministry of the Holy Spirit in convincing men. He says, I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. Two or three ways that may be taken, of course. It may be taken as meaning the apostle when he came to Corinth was worried about his life. And we know that he and the others suffered a great deal. So when he says, I was with you in weakness, in fear, and much trembling, he may be talking about the physical danger that he faced. And later on in this epistle he says, I died daily. And maybe that’s a reference to the fact that his life was always at risk. And it certainly was at risk in places like Corinth. He had enemies, and those enemies were vicious enemies, and he suffered a great deal for it. Read the book of Acts, and you will see that.

On the other hand, it may be that the apostle says, I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling because he recognized the importance and the significance of the message that he was giving to them, and he thought of it as something that was so significant, so important in the light of the truth of God that he gave it out in weakness, fear, and trembling. I think anyone who has ever taught the Word of God, in particular in those early first years of teaching it, knows precisely what we are talking about. The message is so great, so significant, so marvelous. And now I’m called upon to give the message to a group of people. It is enough to make a man weak, fearful, and produce some trembling. It’s not uncommon for that to happen.

Recently there has been a young man preaching over in Fort Worth who was preaching for the first time over there. I asked the congregation how he was doing. They said he was doing fine, but he sure is nervous. Well, he was there in weakness, fear, and much trembling. He’s gotten over it now, and they’re very pleased with the ministry that he has given. And the apostle may have been thinking about it along those lines. But at any rate, he spoke about the fact that he was with them in weakness and fear and in much trembling.

And my speech and my preaching—now, that’s an interesting expression because the word speech is the word *{logos}*, which means simply “word.” My word. What is *{logos}*? *{logos}* is rational speech. My word, rational speech. And then the word that follows, my preaching is a word that really fundamentally refers to a message. And so it’s the combination of rational speech that’s centered in a specific message. My speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

That’s a very interesting expression, and I think it’s highlighted in the 5th verse. And this is one I would like to spend a little bit of time on. He says, “that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” Why would the apostle say something like that? My speech, my preaching, my message were not in persuasive words of human wisdom. Corinth—the Corinthians love that. Remember they were intoxicated with fine words. The apostle came. He didn’t follow that kind of tack. He didn’t spend hours preparing messages like some of us do in order to impress an audience with the fact that he had wisdom, too. And these philosophers who were in Corinth and Athens. They were the only ones who had philosophy, and he wanted to show them that he understood the philosophical word, the word of Plato and others. No. He said they were not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

The word “demonstration” is a word that often, in ancient times, had the sense of proof. So the demonstration of the spirit and power that Paul talks about is not because of the way in which he delivered the message but because of the fact that it was accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember that. We need to remember in all of our teaching and preaching, not

only as teachers and preachers, but of those who sit in the audience, that the power of the Word of God lies in the Word and the Spirit. The Spirit using the Word of God.

So, consequently, when things happen, it is not because brother so-and-so or whatever has preached a great message. It's because ultimately the Spirit of God has used the Word. That's the important thing. And he said, My speech was not in the persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

Now, probably Paul means that my words were accompanied by miraculous things happening. The apostolic age was an age in which those things did accompany the preaching of the Word of God. We know from history that as the ages unfolded after the age of the apostles and after the age of those that were the friends of the apostles who lived on into the 2nd century, those miracles died out.

From time to time emphasis is raised by various individuals saying, We've lost something that we didn't have. And so, generally speaking, they go around seeking to do what they did in the early days, but there's a different quality to the kinds of miracles that are performed according to them in the days that follow and those that happened in the time of the New Testament period. One also learns how different it is from other things, too. And later on in our exposition of this epistle, we will get into that a little bit more. But in the early days, we know that those signs did accompany the apostle's preaching. For example, in Galatians chapter 3 he talks about the fact: you remember that certain things have happened. And then he speaks of the apostles and the signs that they performed in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. So he may be alluding to that, although it's not specifically stated here when he says, In demonstration of the Spirit and power. But I think the fundamental fact that lies on back of it was God worked through the apostle's word. That's important.

What was his motive? His motive is stated in verse 5: that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I think that's one of Paul's really important statements. The faith that rests upon human reason; the faith that rests upon philosophical arguments; the faith

that rests upon cute sayings is the kind of faith that will be at the mercy of others who come along with more insightful, philosophical arguments and cuter statements as well.

So the apostle says, I relied upon the demonstration of the Spirit and power. I preached a crucified Messiah that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men. Anything—any faith that rests in the way in which I or anyone else presents the gospel is not fundamentally grounded in the power of God. The true faith is the faith that the Holy Spirit alone gives which is grounded in the Word of God. It’s not clever arguments, but it’s the power of the Holy Spirit that makes a difference. As Robertson and Plummer say in their commentary, “What depends upon a clever argument is at the mercy of a cleverer argument.”

God alone is the proper witness to the word that is given by the prophets and the apostles. John Calvin made that statement, and he uses the term, *{auto piston}* when he refers to the Word of God in this way, affirming that the Word of God is self-authenticating, meaning of course as the Holy Spirit uses the Word, it authenticates itself as being the genuine Word of God.

It’s very important, it seems to me, for us to recognize that, and sometimes we do not. I think in some ways we think that the way to preach the gospel is to use as many kinds of philosophical arguments as we can. And if we use a lot of philosophical arguments which seem to be wise to us at the present time, then perhaps people will respond to the Word of God. But I don’t think that is what Paul would have been happy with. He thinks of the Word of God as used by the Spirit of God as being the ultimate proof that the truth that he proclaims is God’s truth.

One of the men that I—that I have grown to respect—I should have—some theological professor should have given me instruction in my early years of theological training. When I went to theological seminary, there were very few in the seminary who understood the importance of the history of Christian doctrine. And so, consequently, students suffered. Later, it became even worse, because in that seminary when there were two courses on the history of Christian doctrine, they were eliminated. Why they were eliminated, I don’t know. But I think a history of that institution will reveal that that was one of the great mistakes made 25 years ago, to eliminate courses on the history

of Christian doctrine which would enable a student to understand where he stands, to some extent, within the flow of the history of the Christian church. And so later on I had to, like so many others, had to find that truth from my own reading. I'm thankful to God that he caused me to read some of the histories of Christian doctrine that enabled me to understand things that I did not understand.

One of the many men that I grew to admire was a South Carolina theologian. You might expect that. I didn't even know at first that he was a South Carolina theologian, but it's James Henley Thornwell. I grew up in South Carolina, and I know Thornwell orphanage, and I knew that was related to the Presbyterian church, but I did not know who Thornwell was. But, anyway, later on I studied Thornwell's writings and I profited from them and still profit from them. But he made a significant statement regarding this very verse, in essence, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. This is what he said, but in no case is reason the ultimate rule of faith. It's an interesting statement, but in no case is reason the ultimate rule of faith.

Now, listen to what he says. “No authority can be higher than the direct testimony of God. And no certainty can be greater than that imparted by the Spirit shining on the word: an accredited revelation.” That's what we have. An accredited revelation like an oath among men should put an end to all controversy. In other words, when we read the Bible, we have the authenticating Spirit active in authenticating it to the human heart that responds to his truth. Let me read it again.

Incidentally, G. K. Chesterton, who had said some smart things in very clever ways says, “It's idle to talk always of the alternative of reason and faith; reason itself is a matter of faith. So when a man says, I trust in reason. Why? That's his faith. He's got his faith in human reason.” Precisely.

Thornwell said, “But in no case is reason the ultimate rule of faith,” because it's not the ultimate authority. The ultimate authority is God.

So he says, “No authority can be higher than the direct testimony of God and no certainty can be greater than that imparted by the Spirit shining on the word and accredited revelation like an oath among men should put an end to all controversy.” That's why Paul preached as he did. He was confident as he proclaimed the crucified Messiah that the Holy Spirit of God would accredit his

messages if they were true to the divine revelation as he preached them in the hearts of those that God intended that accreditation to exist. That your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

So to sum up then, God wishes to be known in Christ’s cross. There he has spoken, showing his divine redeeming love, the authentic God is with us. Emmanuel is his name, God with us. And he is there at the cross, and he is for us there. And any kind of preaching that does not major on the cross of Jesus Christ is defective.

The vineyard movement of John Wimber has been an interesting movement. It’s been a growing movement. And it now has grown remarkably with, I understand, over 200 churches. It’s been built upon the position that we should expect signs and wonders such as exorcism of demonic spirits, healing, words of knowledge, speaking in tongues as, quote, “necessary manifestations of the kingdom’s presence in advance,” end quote, with the preaching of the gospel.

In other words, Mr. Wimber’s contention is that if we don’t have signs and wonders, we’re not preaching the gospel. What we’re giving, he states, is simply rational acts of Jesus, and that’s all. So we should expect miracles, signs and wonders in the preaching. If we don’t get them, then we are not preaching the gospel.

Don Carson, who is professor of New Testament at Trinity Seminary, and to my mind one of the brightest of the New Testament scholars, very bright man, says it is virtually impossible to imagine a Vineyard preacher saying with Paul, I resolve to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Now, there is something I think that is important for us today. It is important for us evangelicals. What is important for us evangelicals, in my opinion, is that we have become so occupied with peripheral things, even in evangelicalism, that they have overtaken and, in many ways, have done away largely with the preaching of the gospel and the Word of God as we have it in the Bible.

You look around this city. And if you’re going to church after church that is supposed to be a Christian church, how often—if you understand what is happening, how often do you have exposition of Holy Scripture? And furthermore, the most popular churches in evangelicalism are those churches which now are majoring not on the Word of God but on the other things like entertainment, like music, Christian music. Don’t say non-Christian music. Christian music. And the Word of God is shrinking in its emphasis.

Don Carson in another book makes this statement. I think this is very good. He says, “We have become so performance-oriented that it’s hard to see how compromised we are. Consider one small example. In many of our churches prayers in morning services now function, in large measure, as the time to change the set in the sanctuary.” I love that expression because that’s precisely what happens. You bow your head. No telling what’s happening. He goes on to say, “The people of the congregation bow their heads, close their eyes, and when they look up a minute later, why the singers are in place or the drama group is ready to perform. It’s all so smooth. It’s all so profane,” he says. “Nominally we are in a prayer—in prayer together addressing the king of heaven, the sovereign Lord. In reality, some of us are doing that while others are rushing on tip-toes around the stage and others with their eyes closed are busy wondering what new and happy configuration will confront them when it’s time to take a peek [laughter].” The church of God is the place where the Word of God is to be proclaimed.

One of the reasons we like these other things is we often don’t want to face the Word of God. I know my Bible lies on my desk, and it lies there often, and I don’t open it. Fundamentally, deep down within, some time I feel—I don’t want to say I don’t want to read it, but that’s really what the truth is. I don’t want to read it. Something else would be more interesting, more exciting, and involved than that. Those things would not be harmonious with what Paul talks about.

Well, our time is drawing near the end. We’ll talk more about that later on. But our response to God’s display of himself and the cross, well is a simple response. The apostle says in chapter 1,

verse 21, “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.”

Life is not propagated biologically. If your father was a Christian, your mother was a Christian, it’s no indication whatsoever that you will become a Christian. Life is not propagated ecclesiastically. If your parents were members of Christian churches, and you were sprinkled as an infant or baptized later on without true faith in your heart, you don’t have faith. Those who are Christians are those who have, as the apostles says, they have believed. That’s what Paul told those people in the Philippian jail, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved. Believe. That is, know the truth, assent to the truth, rest upon the truth. That’s all. That’s the grace of God. The message concerning the crucified Messiah by which he gathers his church.

Well, I’m going to read you something that I read in this congregation two or three years ago, a couple of years ago at least. Martha and I were in Scotland two or three years ago, and I was driving down the road toward Dumfries, Scotland. And on the way, I saw a little sign that said, Anwoth. And I went on it—right in my mind—I had forgotten. I didn’t remember, but it kept ringing in my mind. And finally I realized that’s a reference to Samuel Rutherford’s little village in which he had his first church. So I was interested in him, when we came back, we stopped, turned off and went there. I got a chance to see the little church that he had preached in that would hold about 50 people, but he has had an influence all over the world.

Well, he made in one of his sermons the most interesting statement. I am just going to read it. We don’t have time for anything more. In one of his sermons he says, “With all wonders that ever were read an imprinted book, this is the first. Christ made an exchange. Christ would coss (he means barter, that’s the old Scottish word, would coss or barter) lies with you and make a niffer.” Niffer is the Scottish is the old Scottish word for an exchange—and make an exchange, a niffer. “He never beguiled you,” Rutherford said. “He took shame, gave you glory. He took the curse, gave you the blessing. He took death, gave you life. The fairest candle that ever was lighted was blown out. The head of the Church is dead, and the Lord of life is laid down in the grave, no wonder that the sun

that did show or share part of his labours, be shut down, because the great Sun of Righteousness was shut down in the grave, a stone laid over—over him. Good right hath he to Christ accept of his niffer, and change with him, and take his best blessings and purchased redemption.”

I just love that. I’ve repeated it a number of times. So I just ask you to accept of his niffer what Christ has done, believe in him, trust in him, and receive eternal life on the authority of the Word of God. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words that were spoken to the church at Corinth but which have warmed the hearts of the saints for 1900 years. Lord, give us the desire for Thy Word that will honor the triune God, that will also be the means by which others in that chosen group of the church of God may come to know him whom to know his life eternal. Use us, Lord, all of us, for Thy glory.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.