

Victory of the Lamb // May 1, 2022 // Pastor Matt
Sermon Title: Gospel Preachers, Gospel Clients // Sermon Text: Ephesians 3:8

Think of some celebrity endorsements. How about Matthew McConaughey for Lincoln cars or George Clooney for Nespresso coffee machines. Do you think Matthew really drives a Lincoln? Does George really like Nespresso coffee? Well, let's just say he was given 40 million reasons to like it, the kind of reasons that allow you to pay cash for a custom Corvette Convertible.

Now, let's compare that to Sy Sperling, the founder of "Hair Club for Men." If you are old enough to remember disco or Knight Rider, you might remember his cheesy commercials. In a warmly lit living room, Sy tells balding men how they can get a full head of hair by joining his program. As he talks, you notice he himself has a mop of thick brown hair that would make Absalom jealous. Then, he drops the bomb: "I'm not just the president of Hair Club for Men; I'm also a client;" and shows a picture of his previously bald head. You realize: this normal dude really believes in what he is selling because his own life was transformed by the very product he promotes.

In 1 Peter 3:15, the Bible tells us, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Like Matthew McConaughey and Sy Sperling, we are called to offer something to the world around us. It's not fancy cars or a full head of hair; it's the free invitation into God's family, a message that brings hope and eternal life.

But, can I be honest with you? I often don't feel very motivated to share this invitation. In my life, I know I've missed far more opportunities than I have taken to share the hope I have in Jesus.

The Bible tells us that Missionary Paul preached the gospel, the good news of Jesus, to thousands of people and started churches all over ancient Turkey and Greece. Why was Paul so motivated to give an answer to everyone who asked him to give the reason for his hope? Because *Paul was not only a gospel preacher; he was also a gospel client*--much more like Sy Sperling than George Clooney. Listen to what he said in Ephesians 3:8, "Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles (non-Jewish people) the boundless riches of Christ..." In this short verse, Paul

gives us two life-changing factors that transformed him into a Sy Sperling witness, the kind of gospel witness we can all become by God's grace. Two factors. First of all, **We Desperately Need the Gospel We Share!**

Paul is the most amazing missionary who ever lived. He suffered more for Jesus than most Christians would suffer in ten lifetimes. He wrote half the books of the New Testament. Countless churches are named after him. And yet, he said, "I am less than the least of all the Lord's people..." And why? Because before his conversion to Christ, he imprisoned people for believing in Jesus; he fought to eradicate Christianity; he ogled with delight as religious zealots stoned a godly man to death.

So, here's the first factor we need to become powerful gospel witnesses: like Paul we must understand that we are not only gospel preachers; we are clients who desperately need the gospel ourselves, as much as anyone we share it with.

I regularly fancy myself to be a pretty good Christian. But here is the real reason why I think that: because, by nature, I diminish my own sin and magnify the sins of others. By nature, I love to hear about Will Smith slapping Chris Rock in a fit of rage because it makes me feel better about myself. I'm not perfect, but at least I'm not a violent maniac like Will Smith. But I AM awfully judge-y about those crazy Hollywood stars. He's a bit temperamental; I'm pretty self-righteous. What's the difference, really?

At a roadside café in Thailand, a tourist ordered stir fry. When it arrived, he dug right in until he noticed a cockroach leg on the plate. He called the owner over and said, "Hey, there's a cockroach leg in my dish!" She took a good look and said, "That's NOT a cockroach leg. It's a cricket leg!" as if that made it all better. The tourist responded with disgust: "I don't care if they're cockroaches or crickets, I don't want to eat bugs!"

One person struggles with alcohol addiction; another person struggles with gossip; one person does what he thinks will make people like him, even if it is wrong; another person constantly nags his children. A holy God says, "I don't care what it looks like (cockroaches or crickets); I hate all sin!" I want you to picture in your mind the person who annoys you more than anyone else in the world. Please tell me it's not me or this is going to get really uncomfortable for both of

us. Can you admit that, at your core, you are no better than she? Picture the worst person you know; do you see yourself kneeling before the cross of Jesus with him as an equal or standing next to the cross and giving him the stink-eye? A holy God says, "I don't care what kind of sin you have; it's all unacceptable!"

We all have different sinful weaknesses and addictions. It's all disgusting to God, however we label it. If you don't get that through your head, you will not only lack motivation as a Christian witness; you cannot be a Christian. So, I have to ask myself: do my sins bother me at least as much as the sins of others (if not more)? If I think I am better than you or anyone else, God's gospel message means little to me, and I have little motivation to share it with others.

Like Missionary Paul, we must recognize that We are not only gospel preachers; we are clients who desperately need the gospel ourselves, as much as anyone we share it with. But that's only the first factor needed to become a powerful gospel witness. The second factor is that you must realize... **God's Gospel's Message Is Lavish!**

Back to our verse, "Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, (factor 1) this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the boundless riches of Christ..." (factor 2). Bible translators have a little difficulty with that last phrase: This Bible translation says, "the boundless riches of Christ"; another translation says, "the incalculable riches of Christ;" still another translation "the unsearchable riches." The original Greek word Paul used means something like "impossible to understand on the basis of careful examination or investigation." Paul is saying he was given the privilege to share a message which is impossible to understand and accept on our own.

The good news of the Bible is not impossible to understand because of its complexity. Even a Christian toddler understands the gospel: "Jesus loves me; Jesus forgives me!" The good news of the Bible is impossible to understand without God's help because it is far more lavish than we could ever dream!

In China, when someone dies, the family members traditionally sit with the body day and night for a few days to guard it against spiritual forces. All during that time, they may practice *Chao1du4*. It's a Chinese word that means to "to perform religious ceremonies to help the soul find peace." *Chao1du4* includes a lot of chanting, playing musical instruments, and other rituals. When my Chinese

teacher told me about the *Chaodu* for her grandfather, I asked if it brought her any comfort. She was confused by the question. "It's just something we must do to help my grandpa get to heaven. The monks told us what to do and we did that." This is the *natural* religion of all mankind: If I do something good, if I perform the right ritual in the right way, then God *might* accept me, love me, bless me, take me to heaven.

Now, contrast that with our God's lavish gospel message. He says, "There is absolutely *nothing* you must pay or do to be accepted by me, forgiven by me, adopted by me, and raised from the dead to live with me forever. *nothing*. So, no matter who you are; no matter what you have done or what was done to you; no matter how much you have succeeded or failed; you are invited into God's luxurious inheritance through Jesus.

Still more, the forgiveness and acceptance won for you on the cross of Jesus is limitless! Psalm 103 says, "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us." In other words, you cannot overdraw God's savings account of grace. You are just as forgiven and accepted by God on your worst day as you were on your best one. While the world desperately seeks acceptance and value through spiritual activity and worldly accomplishment, you already have it in Jesus--forever. Talk about victory!!!!

So now you have the two factors that can transform you into a powerful witness: 1) We desperately need the gospel we share with others, and 2) God's gospel for us is lavish. In fact, the greater the gap between your sin (factor 1) and God's lavish grace (factor 2), the greater the motivation to share his message of grace with others. The more you understand that you are not only a gospel *preacher* but also a gospel *client*, the greater the motivation to share that message.

Jacob's father was a farmer who often worked 19 hours a day for very little profit. So, it was his earnest desire that Jacob would get good grades in school and bring glory to the family someday. Unfortunately, because Jacob was a struggling student, his father labeled him "rubbish." At one point, he stopped talking to Jacob altogether and refused to even respond when Jacob called him "dad."

Later on, Jacob's grades were good enough that he won a college scholarship. He joyfully told his father, hoping to finally win his father's acceptance, but father merely chastised him for being proud and showing off. Jacob was devastated. He concluded that he was nothing, a loser who had no future.

When he went to Beijing for university, he was happy to get away from his parents and began to seek his worth in other ways, through money and people, but, he says, "I felt my heart was cursed. Lonely, restless, painful, desperate. I hated myself and I hated who I was and what I was. I hated myself because I didn't even have the courage to die. I hated this world. My life was falling apart."

Then, Jacob happened to meet a young missionary who invited him to study the Bible. He learned about the richness of God's grace and the glorious resurrection of Jesus. In Jacob's words, "[God] gives comfort to the broken hearted. He is finding the lost. He gives the hope to the hopeless. He makes the weak strong. He makes the poor rich through his death on the cross. He cares (for) us, not only physical needs [and] spiritual needs, but also emotional needs." This broken young man found the acceptance and love he had been desperately seeking all his life. He didn't need the acceptance of his father anymore, because he had the lavish acceptance of his heavenly Father.

However, instead of turning his back on his earthly father for this new life, he engaged with his father in a new way, a gospel way. The result was that Jacob himself baptized his father over Chinese New Year in 2015.

Because Jacob recognized his own need for the gospel and just how lavish God's gospel is, he was empowered to share that gospel with a father who had nearly ruined his life. Like Paul, Jacob is not just a gospel preacher; he is a gospel client.

So, if you are struggling with the motivation to share your faith with a friend or family member, here's what you need to do: honestly review the depths of your depravity. Stop making excuses; stop looking at the other guy; just consider your own thoughts, words, and deeds in the shadowless presence of a holy God. And then, remember God's lavish gospel. You are his eternally beloved child, and nothing can change that.

Then, as you grow in that grace, like handsome Sy Sperling champions a full head of hair that changed his life, you will naturally champion the grace of God because you understand how much that grace has changed your life.

Discussion Questions:

Share two or three reasons why you or other people you know find it difficult to share the good news about Jesus with others.

Why is it so easy to consider ourselves better than other people?

Read through one of these passages by yourself and be prepared to share 1 or 2 blessings or comforts that it offers you as a “gospel client”.

- Titus 3:4-7
- Zephaniah 3:14-17
- Psalm 103:10-13
- Romans 8:31-34

Describe someone you know who is a great model of sharing the message of Jesus with others. If you don't know someone like that, describe what you think that sort of person would be like.

Write down the name of one person in your life who is far from Jesus and needs to hear his message of good news. Then, in one or two sentences write down one step you can take toward the goal of sharing that message with him/her.