

TITLE: The Gospel shaped church - Proclaims Christ

PASSAGE: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The message and mission of the church is to be Jesus Christ

STRUCTURE:

- Our Christ-Centred Mission is to be marked by:
 - Integrity
 - Patience
 - Humility

- Last term in our series in Galatians, we had the great joy and delight in unpacking the freedom that we have in the Gospel!
- We are completely free from sin, and we have this forgiveness and freedom completely and utterly by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
- So now, what does it mean to be a church that's shaped by this Gospel?
- A lot of churches (including ours) proudly proclaim on our websites and social media that we are a Gospel-centred church - but what does this actually look like?
- Well - a lot of things! We could spend a whole year on these different aspects,
- Yes, the Gospel needs to shape our morals and our relationships with one another, but how does it shape our mission and message as a church?
- Over the next three weeks from 2 Corinthians 4-5, I want us to focus on what it means for our mission as a church.
- And we'll see that the Gospel-shaped church
 - Proclaims Christ
 - Endures Hardships; and
 - Persuades Others.

- In 2 Corinthians, Paul again defends his role as an Apostle.
- In Corinth and in the 1st Century Greco-Roman world, the people valued Rhetoric. Bold Speakers, Complex Arguments. It didn't really matter the content of someone's message - they only really valued the presentation!
- And so here's the situation. You're a church member in Corinth. The churches have been planted by Paul. You've just received the first letter from Paul (which is probably his second) and then some agitators come in...and they say things like - are you really taking this Paul guy seriously?
 - He's a bit of a lightweight; his speeches aren't impressive; he seems to be in prison half the time; why listen to him?!
- Well - then Paul writes what we have as 2 Corinthians and he defends his ministry.
- And he's just been writing about the great ministry that he has, sharing of the glory of God that we can now see because of the work of Christ...
- And then he writes chapter 4.
- And in these opening verses, we see that
- Christ-Centred Mission is to be marked by:
 - Integrity
 - Patience
 - Humility

- **INTEGRITY**
- *Integrity is actually something that our culture actually holds dear!*
- *When it comes to election time here in Australia, I'm sure it's probably one of the most used phrases "I will lead with integrity, giving every Australian a fair go"*
- *But also Aussies are also really good at sniffing out when leaders don't do this - and then good at chucking them out.*
- *If something doesn't pass the pub test, if we smell a rat, or if we see that things don't add up - then the Australian mood and sentiment can turn just like that.*
- *Or our sports men and women - we want them to play with integrity. When there's any hint of cheating, we rake them over the coals, because it's just not the Aussie way.*
- But it's not just true for Aussies but also for Paul and his mission!

- V1 "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."
- He firstly lays out that this mission and ministry isn't self-appointed, but it's purely by the mercy of God.
- It's quite humbling that God doesn't actually need us to do his work, he doesn't need us to further his kingdom, but by his mercy - he includes us!
- And so because he sees this, despite the imprisonments, opposition, flogging, shipwrecks, he doesn't lose heart - we'll come back more to this point next week!
- But also - he refuses to tamper with the message in order to perhaps get more success.
- *You know, when the chips are down, or the weights are stacked against you, it could be tempting to try and tweak things in your favour?*
- *In the workplace when working on a project, it could lead to cutting corners...*
- *In a cricket match, it could lead to some antics involving sandpaper and tampering with the Ball...*
- When it comes to preaching a message, it could lead to tampering with the message to make it more palatable!
- But Paul flat out rejects any hint of this in his ministry.
- He renounces it, he despises it, he spurns it, he forbids it!
- He treats this type of ministry as shameful, as a disgrace!
- He declares it as underhanded or secret keeping.
 - This word for underhanded ways is the greek word *kruptos* which means something hidden. And from this word we get the english word Cryptology - the practise of coding and hiding messages..
- This type of ministry is like saying one thing, but hiding the truth behind your back...
- He refuses any type of craftiness or tampering with the word of God to make it more attractive, or easy to receive.
- So the point is clear: we have no freedom or permission or liberty to change the message that we preach. Any sort of manipulation of the message is completely out of the picture for us here at St John's.
- Now we do see this type of manipulation today in churches.
- The liberal-progressive movement manipulates the message and often waters down the demands and moral implications of the Gospel in an attempt to make the message more popular...
- The charismatic movement can manipulate the message and preach a message of health and wealth. Saying that life will all be fine and dandy if you trust in Jesus.
- The pentecostal movement can manipulate the message by manipulating emotions through big shows and lights and loud music
- But churches like us - evangelical type churches - aren't without fault either.
 - We can reduce the Gospel to simply being a personal ticket to heaven without social or relational implications,
 - we can turn Christianity into a set of doctrines to follow rather than a relationship with the Lord Jesus,
 - and at risk of being labelled as 'legalistic' we can play down the importance of growing more like Christ.
- But Paul says - NO SNEAKY MINISTRY!
- But V2b "but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God."
- Openly state the truth. Lay it all out, don't hold back, preach the truth openly and boldly.
- And people will see that.
- People appreciate integrity. We are to be a church with a message preached and shown with integrity.
- And the fact of the matter - is that some people will love the message, others will reject it.
- But don't change the message but declare the truth, with patience.
- **PATIENCE**
- V3 "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."
- There are people who when they receive the message, simply don't receive it. They just reject it, or don't let it sink in.
- Their hearts are hard, impenetrable.

- This kind of brings to mind the parable of the soils - where the farmer goes to sow his seed, the word of God, but some falls along the concrete path...and the birds come and snatch it away...
- Well, this is because the evil one, the god of this age, satan, has blinded their minds.
- You see the fault isn't with the message, if people reject the message, it's not that the message isn't good enough or attractive enough, the problem is that people harden their hearts to it.
 - As Calvin put it, "the blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of the gospel, for the sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive it.
- But also - we need to remember that we are in a spiritual battle with a real live enemy.
- Satan will do anything he can to blind people. Darken their eyes, harden their hearts.
- He will try and stop the preaching of the Gospel by any means.
- And so we need to be patient and we need to pray!
- Pray that God would remove that veil...Pray that the light of the gospel would shine into people's hearts..pray that God would reveal his glory to the unbeliever.
- Our mission is useless unless it is undergirded by prayer...our evangelism will be ineffective unless it's undergirded by prayer...our growth as a church will be stunted unless it is accompanied by prayer.
- And it will be ineffective unless it is marked by humility.
- **HUMILITY**
- *Just like Aussies value integrity, Australian culture also has a problem with people who are up themselves!*
- *Whenever people think they are the best thing since sliced bread, aussies want to take them down a peg or two!*
- *When people get a bit too big for their boots, aussies again want to strike them down!*
- *So Australians in some way, value Humility.*
- And our Christ-centered mission to be marked by integrity, patience, and humility.
- V5 "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."
- And this is so important...
- Paul's message wasn't himself. It wasn't how great of an apostle he was, it wasn't the latest church that he planted, it wasn't his latest 10-step book to live the best life, it wasn't his latest hobby horse...Paul's message wasn't even just Jesus...but Jesus Christ as Lord.
- This message isn't just that Jesus is a good guy or a good role model...no, in proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord, Paul is proclaiming that Jesus is the saviour of the world, who was crucified for sin, raised victorious over death, is now seated at God's right hand in heaven, and will come again to judge!
- Jesus has all authority and lordship in heaven and on earth!
 - He is the king of Kings
 - And Lord of Lords
 - And anyone who turns to him in humility and repentance, can come and be part of his eternal kingdom!
- That's what Paul proclaims - and that's what we are to proclaim.
- Christ is our message!
- We don't proclaim good advice, we don't proclaim a good way of life to live, we don't proclaim self-help messages, we don't proclaim Anglicanism, we are to proclaim the good news that Jesus Christ is Lord!
- The theological word for this is Christo-centric. We have a Christ-Centered mission, message, and motivation.
- You know, here at St John's, we may not have the biggest staff team, the flashiest programs to invite people to, nor the hippest building or light-show...but we have the best thing going for us - the message of Jesus Christ as Lord!
- It's him that we proclaim...not St John's Wishart! It's him that I proclaim - Not Michael Calder!
- As John the Baptist said - Jesus must increase, and I must decrease. Behold the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.
- And doing this - actually serves the world.
- I wonder how it makes you feel right now - the thought of telling someone about Jesus? What are you feeling? Perhaps its joy! Great!
- For others, maybe there's a sense of unease, maybe embarrassment...maybe you feel a bit awkward, and you just don't want to pressure people...

- But have you ever considered that the best way to serve someone is by telling them about Jesus?
- That's how Paul viewed himself - he was serving the Corinthian church by telling them about Jesus!
- Because it's in Jesus that true life and joy is found!
- The Sri-Lankan Pastor and Evangelist says this about proclaiming Christ - that it's "Simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread"
- It's pointing people to the light and to the source of life
- V6 "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

- So then, what does it mean to be a Gospel-shaped church? It means that we proclaim and preach Jesus Christ as Lord with:
 - integrity - not manipulating the message;
 - Patience - praying that God would unveil eyes; and
 - Humility - not preaching ourselves or our own agenda but Jesus Christ as Lord.
- What does this look like in practice for us?
- Well, in every decision that we make as a church using our limited resources, in every program that we run or don't run, every serving role that we do - we've got to think through - how does this proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord?
 - So if you're on welcoming, you're not just a friendly face, but you might be the first Christian that a person may meet! You might be the first face that someone sees after a significant time away from the church...so in welcoming someone, you are sharing the same hospitality and welcome that Jesus gave to us - because Jesus Christ is Lord. What a cool opportunity!
 - If you're on coffee or morning tea, you're not just serving food, you are providing a space where people can share burdens, pray for one another, and for those who aren't yet Christians - for them to get to know Christians! Your service and warmth proclaims the service that Christ has done for us!
 - If you're on Tech, you're enabling the word of God to be read, sung, heard, both here in this building and beyond on the livestream!
 - If you're on Creche or Sunday School, you are proclaiming that Jesus is Lord and helping grow disciples who will go on to proclaim that Jesus is Lord...
 - I could go on and on!
- We have an amazing mission here at St John's!
- So let's remain laser focussed as a Gospel shaped church. Proclaiming Christ - for his glory.