

# The Power of the Gospel

by Alistair Begg

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*Alistair Begg emphasizes the transformative power of the Gospel and the necessity for preachers to communicate its truths clearly and boldly.*

**Duration:** 58:12

**Scripture:** Genesis 3:9, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:1, Romans 1:1-3

**Topics:** "Gospel"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of preaching the gospel of God rather than putting on a flashy show for the congregation. He compares fireworks, which provide temporary entertainment with no lasting value, to many people's experience of coming out of church. The preacher highlights the power of the gospel of God and the need to proclaim it with boldness and truthfulness. He shares the story of a Galilean carpenter, the incarnate son of God, who came to manifest the immense love of God and reveal the dire condition of humanity. The sermon encourages listeners to humbly acknowledge their need for salvation and embrace the truth of the gospel.

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## Transcript

First chapter of Romans. I want to read from the first verse. Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures regarding his son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David and who through the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his namesake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

To all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints, grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is being reported all over the world. God, whom I serve with my whole heart in preaching the gospel of his son, is my witness how constantly I remember you in my prayers at all times.

And I pray that now at last by God's will the way may be open for me to come to you. I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong. That is, that you and I may be mutually

encouraged by each other's faith.

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I planned many times to come to you, but have been prevented from doing so until now in order that I might have a harvest among you just as I have had among the other Gentiles. I am bound both to Greeks and non Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish. That is why I am so eager to preach the gospel also to you who are at Rome.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel, a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith. Shall we pray together? Make the book live to me, O Lord.

Show me thyself within thy word and show me myself and show me my Savior and make the book live to me for your namesake. Amen. Our work, said Richard Baxter to his fellow preachers long ago and far away, requireth greater skill and especially greater life and zeal than any of us bring to it.

It is no small matter to stand up in the face of the congregation and to deliver a message of salvation or damnation as from the living God in the name of the Redeemer. It is no easy matter to speak so plain that the most ignorant may understand us and so seriously that the deadest heart may feel us and so convincingly that the contradictions of the cavaliers may be silenced. When we read the likes of Baxter and others from his day and generation, many of us, I think, are confronted by a number of glaring and somewhat uncomfortable truths.

Not least of all, I find myself pinned back into a corner in the reading of that kind of phraseology, not just because of its archaic nature, it is somewhat striking, but because the contemporary impact of the truth is unavoidable and much of what passes for biblical gospel preaching in our contemporary churches would largely be unrecognized as such by the likes of Baxter. For in place of doctrinal clarity and accompanying sense of gravity and the ability to convincingly argue with our congregations, many of our people are all too familiar with a kind of preaching which pays scant attention to the Bible, is dreadfully self-focused and consequently is capable of making only the most superficial impact on the hearts and minds of the listeners. That, of course, would be bad enough if congregation after congregation, discerning in their understanding of the Bible and of preaching, were rising to call out to their ministers and their pastors, away with that nonsense, will you not preach the word? But far more dramatic is the fact that large sections of the church are oblivious to the fact that they are being administered a placebo from the pulpit rather than the medicine that they require, and they go away satisfied with the feeling that it has done them some good, a feeling that disguises the gravity of their situation.

And in absence of bread, the population grows accustomed to cake. If you think that that is to overstate the case or it is unfair, then let me apologize in advance for describing circumstances with which you are completely unfamiliar. But if you, along with me, are prepared to take a fair and honest look at the circumstances around us in contemporary Western Christianity, and, dare I say it, primarily here in America, which is able to offer so much to the rest of the world, if we are honest, then we will discover that there is a distinction that is directly related in many cases to the very architecture in which the preaching opportunity takes place.

For we build stages for performers, and we build pulpits for preachers. And when we tend to regard the man as being on a stage, we may induce within him the desire to perform. But when we learn to wait upon him for the word of God as delivered in the power of God by the Spirit of God, then the last thing in the

world that he will ever be tempted to do is to try and perform, for the circumstances are surely far too grave for that.

Now, I recognize that I am 6,000 miles from my original home and culturally vastly different from so much that I enjoy and benefit from here. But my upbringing as a Scottish schoolboy is such that I have fixed in my mind very vividly the commencement of a fairly traditional Sunday morning worship event in the center of Glasgow, which was the second city of the British Empire when we had one. That's just a little history in passing.

But sitting with my family in the church in the moments before the commencement of worship, I was struck by the rigmarole that I thought of it as then that took place when a man dressed in a robe came out from a door behind the pulpit, carrying in his two hands a largely massive Bible. And he then proceeded to go up the stairs into the pulpit, and it was quite a walk up the stairs. And when he got up the stairs, the door into the pulpit, which was velvet on the inside and wooden on the outside, had already been previously opened by him, which, of course, was a strategic move because he would have been really flummoxed with this gigantic Bible trying to open the door.

But they didn't call him the Beatle for nothing. He was good at his job. And he would enter the pulpit, and then he would lay down the Bible.

He would then open it to the passage of Scripture, which was the study of the day. He would then proceed back down the stairs and through the door from whence he had come. That was part one.

Part two was when he reappeared, opening the door, standing to the side of the door, and ushering in the minister, who would then proceed the Beatle up the stairs. And when he had taken his seat in this pulpit, the parish official, Beatle, B-E-E-D-L-E, for those of you who think it's Lennon McCartney or something, people are going, oh, yeah, he went to church. Paul McCartney was in his church.

He carried the Bible. No, it's nothing to do with that at all. He would then close the minister in, turn the handle, lock him in, essentially, and go back down the stairs and back out the door.

Now, I'm not just a boy sitting in there. What do I know so far? You say, I haven't got a clue what you know so far. You better tell me.

OK, I know this, that whatever that gentleman is in that box to do, it is something to do with that large book that the other gentleman just carried up the stairs. And indeed, as the service then proceeded, it was manifestly obvious even to the tiniest mind that while the posture of the preacher was to stand with the text of the Bible below him at eye gaze, in actual fact, the picture was of the preacher himself standing underneath the Scriptures upon which he took his authority or from which he took his authority. Now, I suggest to you that you have to then say, OK, allowing for the culture of the day and allowing for the anachronisms of time, is there anything of validity there in contrast to the largely unbelievable commencements to many of our worship services? And finally, the character who appears to fulfill the obligation of preaching the word.

So we have the cheerleader, a well-meaning fellow who has a peculiar need to be liked and accepted. Whatever the context of a particular message, he is always going to be positively inspirational. A good Sunday for the cheerleader is where his people laugh a lot, where they are affirmed and affirming, and they go away more self-assured than when they had arrived.

Been in church with the cheerleader lately? Or how about the conjurer? When you hear the congregation declaring, wasn't it amazing what he got out of that? Your antenna should go up and you should be immediately alarmed because you shouldn't immediately assume that the news is good. When the preacher refuses to do the hard work of actually understanding the meaning of the text, when he divorces it from the context of application, then he is able to get just about anything he fancies out of it and to make it appear that he is exercising some unique and priestly function that the average person in the careful reading of their Bible will be unable to discover, and so he isolates himself from the people who are students with him, and it makes it appear that he is able to produce things like a conjurer out of the hat. R. W. Dale, addressing the faculty and students of Yale University in 1876, says of this, I always think of the tricks of those ingenious gentlemen who entertain the public by rubbing a sovereign between their hands till it becomes a canary and drawing out of their coat sleeves half a dozen brilliant glass globes filled with water and with four or five goldfish swimming in each of them.

For myself, I like to listen to a good preacher and I have no objection in the world to being amused by the tricks of a clever conjurer, but I prefer to keep the conjuring and the preaching separate. Conjuring on Sunday morning, conjuring in church, conjuring with texts of Scripture is not quite to my taste. Now, there's purpose in what I'm saying here.

This is not an elaborate introduction to fill in the time. I'm asking you to think about this, and some of you are young men approaching the immense privilege of becoming a preacher of the Word of God, and you are surrounded by all of these kinds of influences, and the people who appear to be the brightest and the best and the apparently more successful may already be identifiable in some of these caricatures, for caricatures they certainly are. Let's leave the storyteller aside, the guy who's always got a story about a Labrador dog that fell on the railway, and his grandmother picked it up and took it home, and it finally rescued somebody in the Swiss Alps, and as a result of that, people have gone, oh man, that was a great sermon.

Which one was that? It was the one about the Labrador in the Swiss Alps, you know. Hey, do the one about the Labrador again, would you? We love that Labrador one. And if you start that stuff, this is what happens to your people.

Soon as you start to get textual or theological at all, they turn you off. Soon as you bring the Labrador back out, they turn you back on. So you breed a congregation that is not actually interested in learning the Bible, they just sit around waiting for your next story.

The cheerleader, the conjurer, the storyteller, the entertainer. Well, I could go on, but that's kind of negative, so let's just leave that aside. Or what about a hobby horse writer? The guy, you give him any text in the Bible and he always preaches the same sermon.

I don't have my notes with me. No, I think here I do, that's good. Campbell Morgan has a great story about the Baptist preacher who had a fixation with baptism and referred to it constantly.

One morning he announced his text, Adam, where are you? Genesis three, nine. He continued. There are three lines we shall follow this morning.

First, where Adam was. Second, how he was to be saved from where he was. Third and last, a few words about baptism.

And there are people, and it doesn't matter, you can give them Leviticus 19 to expound, and within three and a half minutes they're talking about rock music and Armageddon. Doesn't matter. And I'll tell you why.

Because it's their hobby horse. And they are always bringing to the text what they want to say, rather than allowing the text to say what it says. And that is difference.

That is not exposition. That is imposition. And if we're going to be serious about these things, then serious we must be.

Now, I'm being somewhat playful and I'm speaking about myself, I hope, first, rather than anybody else. And as I was writing this, just this morning, I found myself remembering that song. I don't know if it was Three Dog Night or who it was.

Three Dog Night was a number of things that we'll leave alone for the moment. But anyway, the lyric that was in my mind was, all the game preachers play now. They're not preachers, people.

All the game preachers play now. Every night and every day now. Never thinking what they say now and never saying what they mean.

And then they while away their hours in their ivory towers, till they're covered up with flowers in the back of a black limousine. I was once at church on the way, and I saw the pastor there. He did that.

He had them singing in his sermon. I thought that was a great idea. Admittedly, he wasn't singing this, but it was good talking about you and me and the games people play.

Well, why would that ever be the case? If the responsibility that is charged to us is of making the gospel fully known, why would we ever do anything else than make the gospel fully known? Why, if the gospel is the very power of God, would we ever fiddle with it or seek to enhance it or trivialize it or ever be guilty of emptying it of its power, as Paul says when he writes to the Corinthians? Well, I think there are myriad answers to that, but two are these. In some cases, we are actually confused as to the nature of the gospel. Confused as to the nature of the gospel.

Oh, you say, surely not. I've understood the gospel for a long time. I was brought up on the gospel, and I understand it.

Well, of course, we understand the rudimentary nature of what it means to be in a fallen condition and so on. But in light of yesterday morning's first exposition, I think many of us are prepared to say perhaps we haven't got as solid a grasp of this as we might have believed. Martin Lloyd-Jones, arguably the finest preacher in the 20th century in the United Kingdom, was an outstanding preacher even as a young man.

He preached initially in Bridgend, which is in South Wales. He knew in the early days of his ministry even a touch of revival, and he was constantly emphasizing to his congregations the necessity of being born again. On one occasion after a sermon, a minister, an older minister who was present listening to the younger Lloyd-Jones preach, challenged Martin Lloyd-Jones with this statement.

He said, Martin, the cross and the work of Christ had little place in your preaching. Have you think about that for just a minute? Of all the constructively critical things that anybody could ever say, that is surely the most arresting, especially when we are endeavoring to press upon people the need to come to faith in Jesus Christ, to have a man who loves us, cares for us, is interested in us, and is theologically adept to

come and say the cross and the work of Christ had little place in your preaching. So what did he do? Did he tell him to fly a kite? Did he go home and say to his wife, can old Mr. So-and-so was here, the minister from up the road? He's only got 50% of the people that I have.

I don't know what he's on about. I don't preach the cross. I preach the cross, don't I, honey? Oh, sure you do, Martin.

You're a great preacher. Let's have a bowl of cereal. You're fine, you know.

Don't let that nasty, don't have the deacons throw him out if he comes again. We don't want to hear from him. No, he didn't do that.

The very next morning, he went to the local bookstore. He bought James Denny, the death of Christ. He bought R. W. Dale on the doctrine of the atonement, and he began to read them.

And he didn't eat his lunch, and he didn't eat his dinner, and he never came out of his bedroom. He caused his wife such anxiety that she called her brother to see if they should call the doctor. And when he emerged from his study, this is what he said.

I have found now the real heart of the gospel, and the key to the inner meaning of the Christian faith. And from that point, those who knew Lloyd-Jones' preaching are able to testify that the content of his preaching changed, and with it the impact of his teaching. And the basic question, said Lloyd-Jones, was not Anselm's question, why did God become man, *kurdis homo*, but the essential question, he said, was why did Christ die? And he had been preaching without fully getting clear in his mind the nature of the atonement, which of course is the very core of the power of gospel proclamation.

And the reason, I think, that some of us are tempted to go down into these by-path meadows, is although we may not like the notion, we are actually a little confused as to the nature of the gospel itself. In some other cases, we are frankly compromised. And we're compromised by our desire for acceptance.

We want to be accepted by just about everybody. We want to be accepted by our congregation. We want to be accepted by our peers.

We want to be accepted by those that we admire, and especially those who are apparently very successful in the things of preaching. Well, the temptation to be ashamed is real, I would want to confess to it. Immediately, I played golf last Tuesday at a very nice place in Ohio with a gentleman who had spoken to me subsequent to a funeral service I had conducted two weeks prior to our golf game.

Very successful businessman in the financial world. Came every so often, maybe at Christmas or Easter, at the invitation of his children. Was largely kindly towards me, but I always had the impression that he was very glad when I left his company.

That is not an unfamiliar feeling, I must confess, but it was quite striking in his case. And after the funeral service, as we gathered at someone's home, he came to me and he said, would it be okay if we got together and talked? He said, what you said today pierced my shield. Which I thought was a very interesting phrase.

And so we met together and we played golf, and the golf lasted for four and a half hours, and it was a beautiful day, and there was another man present and so on. And when we finally sat down to lunch, he

said, well, why don't you just tell me then? And I said, well, somewhat uncomfortably, what do you want me to tell you? And he said, well, let me tell you what I think it is you're saying, and then you tell me if this is what you are saying. And if it is what you are saying, then I want you to know up front that I don't like what you're saying.

So I said, okay, well, the terms of engagement are really clear now. I understand that I'm basically on a hiding to nothing. But you know what happened to me? As I started to articulate the gospel, I found myself trying to clean it up, trying to spin it just a little.

And I was arrested. I could hear myself speak, and in the back of my head, it was like a cannon going off, and it was, Alistair, tell him the truth. Don't mess around.

Tell him the truth. Don't be ashamed. And so I told him about this Galilean carpenter who was the incarnate Son of God, who in a moment entered our time-space capsule and came manifesting the love of God, which was immense, and declaring the gravity of the condition of man, which was dire, and that although he found it very unpalatable and had enough money to join most clubs in America and travel anywhere that he wanted in the world, I had bad news for him.

And that was that unless he was prepared to get down on his knees and admit that he was in dreadful need of Christ as a Savior, there was no prospect of him ever going to heaven. But that if he would, and that the arms of God were open wide to him, and he would welcome him in his embrace. I mention that because I felt a little bit ashamed at first.

Paul also felt ashamed. Otherwise, why would he say, I'm not ashamed? Oh, I know the commentators say this is litotes. In other words, that he's using the negative as a form of the positive, that he's exaggerating in the English way by saying, I am not amused by this or I have no little joy in this or all that stuff.

You know, what did he just say? And so they say that what he's saying is that mainly English commentators. But I don't think so. He's saying I've looked shame in the face.

And I know what it is to walk into this place, and I know what it is to face these people. And in the same way that I said to you, Timothy, do not be ashamed of the message and do not be ashamed of me, the servant of the message. Why would he ever address the issue of shame if he didn't know that there were the potential for being ashamed? Let's be honest.

Many of the stories that are around us are far more palatable to the minds of modern man than the idea that the only answer to the predicament of humanity is to be found in the bleeding situation on a hill there, Golgotha, outside of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago. That's our message, that there is salvation in no one else, for there's no other name given under heaven among men by which we must be saved. And in an age of syncretism and in an age of confusion, it just reverberates around the walls, and you can hear people saying like McEnroe from Wimbledon years ago, you can't be serious.

You can't be serious. And in the back of your mind, you're saying, yeah, I am. Yeah, I'm serious.

Yeah, yeah, I'm serious. Yes. And you know, you're sort of pushing yourself.

Yeah, yeah, I'm serious. Why would we be surprised that the message of the cross is both misunderstood and rejected by people? Goodness, it was misunderstood and rejected by the disciples themselves, wasn't

it? Here they are on the very at hand's length to Jesus. Jesus says to them, Matthew chapter 16.

From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. He says, OK, guys, let me just tell you exactly what's going to happen as we get ready to go up here to Jerusalem. And he explains to them that they are moving towards this pivotal event of human history and that this aspect of the atonement, this Lamb of God thing that John the Baptist had been talking about, and they presumably had kicked around with one another and said to one another, what do you think the Baptist was on about when he was doing that Lamb of God thing? The Lamb of God in the Old Testament always died, but we want Jesus to be alive.

And Jesus says, now we're going up here and this is what will happen. And Peter, and I'm quoting Philip's paraphrase now, Peter took him aside and started to remonstrate with him over this. God bless you, master.

Nothing like this must happen to you. Jesus, we're not going to be able to go on if you do this. Jesus, things are going well now.

We've got a good crowd going. It's building. People are happy with your miracles.

Sometimes there's a little reaction to some of your parables, but by and large, we're on the move now. And here you are, and you keep saying the same thing, that you must go up to Jerusalem and you must be killed. Jesus, I love you.

You're my master, but let me just tell you, nothing like this must ever happen to you. That's Peter. He didn't like the idea of the cross.

And on this side of the cross, ask yourself the question, when is the last time that you preached or heard preached a series of sermons on the cross of Jesus Christ? I'm not talking about a series of sermons about how you can know fulfillment and peace and contentment and liberation and all of those things which are benefits of an understanding of the gospel. But when's the last time that we did that? And why the absence? If the gospel is the power of God, then do you think there might just be a correlation between the sorry impact that the church makes and the absence of this very central message? Now, given all of that, I ask a further question, and I hope there is at least some progression in this. What then will ever make a man a gospel preacher? Why would it ever possess somebody to be a preacher of the gospel? Well, let's just look at the verses that we read in Romans 1, and let me just point out to you the progression in Paul's life.

Uniquely, he was an apostle, part of an unrepeatable group who became the foundation of the church. We understand this, but the call of God to the task of gospel preaching is one that God has continued to extend down through the corridors of time, and still does. So if we ask what will make a man a gospel preacher, we must answer, first of all, in verse 1, being set apart for the gospel.

Called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God. Set apart for the gospel of God. Secondly, a thorough grasp of biblical theology.

A thorough grasp of biblical theology. When Paul then says he's set apart for the gospel, he then goes on in verse 2 through to the end of verse 5 to give a little discourse on the nature of the gospel, on the humanity and deity of Christ, and so on. And if we are going to be gospel preachers, and if there is going

to be power that comes through the preaching of the gospel, then first of all, you cannot have a man who simply banged up against a pulpit and speaks like a sort of knowledgeable fellow speaking with emphasis.

You have to have somebody who has the call of God upon his life, and then having been called, has been prepared, and in that preparation, which Paul knew away from the spotlight, God burned into his heart clearly an understanding of the gospel, an explanation of his Damascus Road experience, and a conviction as to what he must do. Otherwise, he would be unable to write such a theological treatise as is found in the book of Romans itself. That's why we need to be clear as to the nature of theology.

Thirdly, that we need to be men of wholehearted, simple-focused devotion. We're going to preach the gospel. Look at verse 9. God, whom I serve with my whole heart, in doing what? In preaching the gospel of his Son.

I never noticed that before. I've read this chapter a number of times in my life, but I never noticed the way the two things end. I am serving God with my whole heart in the preaching of the gospel of his Son.

It relates to one of the questions that was asked yesterday, you know, how do you manage your time and how do you respond to needs and everything else? Jesus sets the standard and the pattern for us in the beginning of Mark's gospel, a wholehearted devotion, setting his face to Jerusalem in the task of proclamation. Also, a sense of obligation attaches to it. Verse 14, I am bound, or I think the Revised Standard Version has, I am under obligation both to the Greeks and the non-Greeks, both to the wise and the foolish.

What does he mean? Well, if I was given by somebody who is your friend a thousand dollars for you and I had it in my possession, I would be in your debt until I gave to you what it had been entrusted to me for you. I would be indebted to you to the tune of a thousand dollars. And that's the picture.

The analogy is not perfect, but that's the picture. It's not really indebtedness, it's stewardship. But nevertheless, what he is saying is this.

God, who loves these individuals, has entrusted to the preacher this message that he has to fulfill his obligation in by giving into the custody of these individuals. Then, along with that sense of obligation, a sense of eagerness. Look at verse 15, that is why I am so eager to preach the gospel.

Also, to you or at Rome, he says, I'm eager to preach the gospel and I'm eager to preach the gospel in Rome. Can I ask you gentlemen just for a moment in pastoral ministry, are you eager to preach the gospel? Okay, three of you, that's fabulous, good. We got a movement going now, this is terrific.

Now, you don't have to shout out, I'm not used to that anyway, and it doesn't matter whether the guy next to you knows that you're eager or your wife thinks you're eager. What really matters is the answer of your heart before the living God, because God knows whether I'm eager or not. God knows whether I'm a reluctant prophet.

God knows whether I want to serve him from my core. God knows whether I have a sense of indebtedness and obligation, or whether as time has eroded my conviction, I have become a cheerleader, or a storyteller, or a performer, or I get kudos out of the fact that I get to speak in front of large groups, and all that is actually happening is wood, hay, and stubble, which unfortunately for me will not be revealed until the day that I stand before God. So it's a very, very sobering question.

Is there a sense within me of obligation? Woe is me if I don't do this. I may not be great at it, but I'm going to do it. And you know what? I'm eager to do it.

I can't wait to get there. I can't wait for the opportunity. Don't be misled by thinking that this is some cozy feeling about it, because there is immediately an antithesis that is set up in my mind.

It's a bit like a sailor, I would suppose, who is drawn to the sea, knowing that when he goes out on the sea, the waves will take him up, but they'll also crash him down, knowing that there is great peril on the sea, but knowing that there are great vistas there, and it's this strange feeling. And so the pulpit draws the preacher to the pulpit the way the sea draws the sailor to the sea, knowing that you may be lifted up on the waves, but you may be crashed dreadfully down, and that as Bruce Spielman says, to preach, to really preach, is to die naked a little at a time, and to know each time that you do, that you're going to have to do it all over again, and sometimes within 45 minutes. That then brings us to our text.

Only an idiot would say that after 35 minutes. Paul himself expresses eagerness here, and then he says, in all honesty, when he showed up in Corinth, he was there in weakness and fear and in much trembling. Why in the world then is he so eager to go to Rome, not as a tourist, but as an evangelist? Was it merely presumption on Paul's part that this little funny little man felt that he had something to say that Rome needed to hear? You understand that, preacher? You have got to believe that in your core.

God has got to stem that into your heart, that you have something to say that Los Angeles needs to hear. They don't know they need to hear it, but you know they need to hear it. And if you and I are not possessed of that conviction, we'll never go say it to anybody.

Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you. Sorry, I don't mean to impose upon you. Sorry, I know you've got many other things on your mind.

Sorry, I know you're reading a book. Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry. Oh, clear off! As opposed to standing up and going, men and brethren, listen! Yeah, what are you on about? Well, Jesus of Nazareth? Yeah, yeah, go on, go on.

He is the savior of all who put their trust in him. Uh-huh. Any more? Yeah.

And then off we go. But without a conviction. You know, every time I watch the TV, I say, like somebody said the other night, they wanted to stand up and preach somewhere.

I want to stand up and preach everywhere. Don't you? I mean, you're not a preacher if you don't want to stand up and preach. I don't mean so that my voice can be heard, so that the power of the gospel can be heard, for goodness sake.

Right? The thing that 10,000 people there the other day in Fort Worth, Texas, I don't know all that went on. I just heard the CNN commentary that came over the top, and it was absolutely bogus. And they denuded the impact of any gospel content that was delivered to the people, as I'm sure there was a tremendous amount of it.

But the people in the airwaves listening to CNN, they just got a bunch of ecumenical nonsense about the faith traditions, and people in their faith traditions are helped by the notion of resurrection, and some guy from an interdenominational center who was full of hot air just went on and on and on and denuded the thing of the impact, because I could see in the eyes of people that they were singing about the risen Christ

and the power of the resurrection and every other thing. And you want to get on and grab a microphone and say, hey, CNN, I want to just tell you something for a moment, you know. I have something that everybody in America needs to hear.

Who are you, arrogant? What's your problem? Well, if it's true, I'm not arrogant. And if it isn't true, I'm sorry for interrupting you. Go back to your coffee.

Why would Paul want to go to Rome as an evangelist rather than as a tourist? His position is true. He was an ugly wee man. He had beetle brows, bandy legs, baldy head, hook nose, bad eyesight, and no great rhetorical gift.

Apart from that, he was quite striking. So whatever, whatever in the world could he hope to accomplish amongst the wise and the influential in Rome? Wouldn't it be better for him just to stay home? No, think about it. Think about it, goodness gracious.

Don't be laughing. Think. Why would this little man go in to the center of humanity as represented in Rome in the extent of an empire that went from Scotland all the way across the globe? Why? Because that the gospel is the power of God.

That's it. That's the beginning of it, and the middle of it, and the end of it. The gospel, says Nigren, is not the presentation of an idea, but it is the operation of a power.

When, says James S. Stewart, the Scottish Presbyterian of old, the apostles went out onto the Jerusalem streets to proclaim the fact, the very proclamation constituted for the hearers a divine invasion crisis. So the apostles go out and they declare, Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, has been made both Lord and Christ, and they proclaim repentance and faith in him, and it is a divine invasion crisis. And as Greg said just the other day, the people were saying, they were cut to the heart, and they said, men and brethren, what shall we do? Now, that is vastly different from the average response, isn't it, to the preaching of whatever it is we're preaching in our day? I mean, sometimes I want to crawl from where I stand underground, and as far underground as I can possibly go at the end of a sermon.

In fact, most times. When I stand and have to shake hands with people, I wish that the floor would open up and swallow me, for a ton of reasons. But I suppose more than any other reason, that I long, just once, to be so enabled by the Spirit of God to proclaim the gospel of God, which is the power of God, that at the end of it, people are saying, what in the world do we do with it? Rather than, well, are you going to Shonis, or shall I meet you back at the house? You know? The guy's preached his heart out.

The congregation says, well, I don't know if I want pancakes, or, I don't know, we had pancakes last week. I didn't get fish this week. This is within 14 nanoseconds of the Amen at the end of the benediction.

This is very different. The streets of Jerusalem are very different from the Scottish preacher who, as he's preaching, looks forward and sees the boy, Jimmy McGregor, sitting with his dad, Mr. McGregor. And Mr. McGregor has been asleep.

He's in the third and fourth stages of anesthesia and has been for some time. And the minister reaches for him and he says, hey, Jimmy, waken your daddy. And Jimmy shouts back, you waken him.

You put him to sleep. How in the world is it that we can claim to proclaim something that is as powerful and as magnificent as this to be so patiently ineffective? Has God's word changed? Has the heart of man

changed? No. Has the spirit's power changed? Well then, without being unduly simplistic, let me try and move this to a conclusion by asking this painful question.

Do you think it might be possible that some of us have lost confidence in this crucial truth? That the gospel is the power of God for salvation? Because if it is not that we have lost confidence in it, why is it that we're always seemingly trying to help it out? Why is it that we seem patently unable to ask the spirit of God to enable us to declare it in all of its bold simplicity and essentially leave it there? I don't mean sermons without illustrations. I'm not talking about stuff like that. But I'm talking about it doesn't need any help from us, you know.

Those of you who play golf know, and I play at golf as opposed to those who play golf, but when you set the club at the top of your bank swing, the angle that you have in your wrist and the sense of turn that you've created is the key to all of the power that is then able to be unleashed. You cannot unleash any more power than is set at the top of the bank swing. So if none is set, there's nothing there to come down.

But if you make a good turn and if you set the club well, then if you come back the right way, then all of that power will be unleashed. But if prematurely you cast the club and lose the angle, then all that you're left with is a dreadful flailing at the ball and the ignominy that follows your pathetic attempt. And some bright spark with you has always got a little cliché ready to drop out, you know, a little nugget.

Ah, let the club head do the work. Let the club head do the work. Why? I'll let the club head do the work right around your ear if you're not careful.

The fact that it's true doesn't necessarily help, because we can't always take a word of admonition when we need it. And some of you today are annoyed by this already, and you're just longing for me to finish so you can leave. And my prayer for you is that you will get no rest in your heart and mind when you drive in your car and sit in your study with your Bible until not you agree with that what I'm saying is accurate, but until you reconcile yourself to the truth that the gospel is the power of God and that the only way that men and women come to believe and have their life transformed is by doing what Paul urges us to do here.

The gospel is more than merely the message. It's more than simply the account of what God has done for men. Understand this.

The gospel is itself the power of God. God saves people through the message of the gospel. It is the power to you.

It is of God. It belongs to God. It is a power which becomes active on the lips of the preacher.

It is a power that is not active in a stained glass window or in a passion play or in a bunch of singing or in a religious poster. If that were the case, Jesus and the apostles would have been artists for crying out loud. They would have set out and done paintings and everything says, oh, make a note of it.

He hates paintings. No, I love painting. Doesn't like drama.

Yeah, I like drama, but I'm telling you that when you read your Bible, the power of God is active on the lips of the preacher, not solely, but primarily. That is why in Mark, as you read it, Jesus heals all these people and the demons are cast out. He goes away early in the morning.

The fellas come in and finally say, Jesus, this thing is off to a flying start. They are looking for you absolutely everywhere. That was a home run last night and we are on the go now.

We are rolling. And Jesus says, let's get out of here. What? Yeah, he says, let's get out of here and go someplace else that I may preach the gospel for that is why I came.

Now, if you think about it, that makes perfect sense, isn't it? That he did not come ultimately as a healer and he hasn't dispensed to us these capacities so that we may divert ourselves from the issue. God is unable to heal, but the fact of the matter is that most of the great and dramatic claims for healing are nowhere directly related to the obvious transformation in the New Testament. And there are many reasons for that, but one of the God wants us to be involved with the power of the gospel.

When Paul finally wraps it with the Corinthians, his concern is that their faith won't be resting on the wisdom of man, but in the power of God. Now, my time is gone. It's probably more than gone, but let me just try and wrap this by pointing this out.

I'm not ashamed of the gospel, he says. I'm eager. And the reason I'm eager is because I'm not ashamed of the gospel.

And the reason that I'm not ashamed of the gospel is because it is the power of God. What is it the power of God for? It's the power of God for salvation. In other words, it is a purposeful power, unlike fireworks, where you have sort of 35 seconds of entertainment with no lasting value.

I mean, I know it jazzes you for about however long they can get it up beyond the Magic Fairy or whoever it is here, by the Castle of Enchantment or whatever the place is, but eventually it's all like, well, let's go home. Let's find a car. That was good.

I'm sunburned. There's nothing really there. It's like a lot of people coming out of church.

Firework show is over, nothing really there and no lasting value. And every time you get into the trap of doing a firework show for your congregation, you better have a better one next week. And the week after that, you better come up with something really wild.

But I'll tell you what, if you're prepared just to preach the gospel of God, stand back and watch. Get out of the road because it is no secret what God can do. The power of God for salvation, the totality of human wisdom, which sets aside the cross, cannot bring forgiveness, cannot grant peace, cannot bring satisfaction, cannot feed the hungry soul.

At the end of the 20th century, we have more education than we've ever had, but men and women aren't more moral. We have more resources, but people are no less selfish. We have tremendous powers of communication, but husbands and wives don't talk to each other and kids don't understand their parents.

It is the power of the gospel alone that saves, that rescues man from his lost estate, that restores him to his true identity and his destiny and fellowship with God. It delivers from the burden of guilt, heals the brokenness of life that sin brings, subsequently completes the recovery process, removes us from bondage and tyranny, and sets us on the road to a lifelong experience of moral and spiritual transformation. That's what happens.

You know that to be true. David Watson, who was tremendously used of God as an evangelist in the 1970s, he was an Anglican minister, described how in speaking at an English university years ago now, he had talked to one girl who had the reputation of the toughest girl in our university. She'd slept around freely, taken every drug on the campus.

Outwardly, she didn't care about anything, and she seemed quite hardened against the Christian faith. And he tells after one of his meetings, she came up to him still smoking. To say that she had asked Christ into her life to be her savior and Lord, and his immediate reaction was, oh yeah, time will tell.

The next night she returned and he hardly recognized her as being the same person. She told him how she'd spent most of the day crying. For years and years, she explained in spite of her toughness and her hardness, she felt, quote, as guilty as hell.

No one would have guessed it, but on that Sunday night, all the guilt had been coming out and she was overwhelmed by the love of Jesus. She couldn't really believe that Christ loved her and had died for her and had taken away all her sins. And how did that come about? By the power of God, which is the gospel, which brings about salvation.

It wasn't because Watson was so skillful, although he was an amazing speaker. It was because God used his word. Now, for those of you who are concerned about the phrase that this gospel is a righteousness from God that is revealed, a righteousness that is from first to last, just do this.

Just say, okay, for that, go to tape one yesterday, 2 Corinthians 5.21, and that answers for us the whole question of what is this righteousness of God. It is wonderfully summarized for us by John Stott when he says, a righteous status, which God requires if we're ever to stand before him, which he achieves through the atoning sacrifice of the cross, which he revealed in the gospel and which he bestows freely on all who would trust in Jesus. And all of this is a matter of faith from start to finish.

It is salvation for everyone who believes. And that's why we call to people to trust in Christ. And what a mystery is in this, because the Bible is a closed book except to the eye of faith.

But then we faithfully proclaim it, and we find that people's eyes are being opened. How else are we going to confront men and women with the gravity of their sin, with the necessity of grace, with the opportunity of faith, unless we preach the gospel? How else are men and women going to be brought to see their plight except in light of God's power? And let's come full circle and go back to it and ask ourselves the question, hey, do you not think we're tempted to be a little bit ashamed? What about Joshua 6? Dad comes home and says, kids, starting tomorrow morning we're going to have a great time. We're going to be going around the walls of the city, and a few of us have got trumpets and stuff, and then at a certain point we're going to blow them.

And the kids are going, what? What are we doing that for? Well, God is going to make the walls fall down, son. Yeah, Dad, that's good. That's good.

Yeah. Do I have to come? Yeah, you've got to come. Dad, I don't want to come and do that.

I don't want a trumpet. I'm not doing that. Some of my friends, they'll see me, Dad.

I'm not going out around there. And so they go first day, second day, third day, fourth day, fifth day. You imagine the kid on the last day, Dad, we are not going to do this again, are we? Do you know how

ridiculous we look? The people all around are saying, do you honestly believe God? Do you honestly believe that God's power will be manifest in such a bizarre and crazy looking way? This is foolishness to the wisdom of man.

Do you? The father closes the bedroom door of his son. He hears this little voice going, and that's how that song was written. No.

Sorry. Two illustrations and I'm done. So you were done a while ago.

Well, OK, but I'm going to finish. Alexander White was known as something of a monomaniac at the turn of the century as a preacher in Edinburgh. He was famous for preaching always about sin and salvation.

People would say, anytime you hear Alexander White preach, it's always about sin and salvation. And at the turn of the century, with the rise of liberalism, this message was becoming increasingly unpopular and unpalatable. And he was tempted, he says, to muffle it so that he might gain acceptance.

He was becoming just to be a little bit ashamed of it. And while walking in the Scottish Highlands, taking some summer vacation, he describes how there he heard what seemed to him like a divine voice that spoke with all commanding power in his conscience, declaring to him, Alexander, go on and flinch not. Go back and boldly finish the work that God has given you to do.

Speak out and fear not. Make them at any cost to see themselves in God's holy law as in a mirror. Do that, for no one else would do it.

No one else would so risk his life and his reputation to do it. And you've not got much of either left to risk. Go home and spend what is left of your life and appointed task of sharing with people the power of God in the gospel.

1952, the year that I was born, a young man was facing a crisis in his own life, whether he was going to continue in the context of Minnesota and Minneapolis, or whether he was going to commit himself to the task of evangelism. And as he walked out in the trails near his home, asking God to show him his way forward, he read his Bible and he read every scripture he said that he could on the issue of evangelism, and then said, Billy Graham, I thought about Christ's death on the cross. Above all other motives as a spur to service, an incentive to evangelism is the cross of Christ and it's irrepressible compassion.

And says the biographer, as he walked home, he sang to himself, rescue the perishing, care for the dying, snatch them in pity from sin and the grave, weep for the erring ones and lift up the fallen and tell them of Jesus. He's mighty. It would be one thing if we were left on our own, wouldn't it? He has given his spirit to fill us, and his word to direct us, and his promise to encourage us, and is welcome to give us hope.

Father, out of all of these words, I do pray that you will get glory to yourself and that you will stir our hearts afresh. As we think about all of the words that have been spoken from this pulpit throughout these days, as we take the encouragement that has come and the challenge that we face, we pray that you'd set us free from any human manipulation, and that we might sense afresh the wooing and the winning and the loving of the Lord Jesus himself. What a mystery it is that you would choose to grant us the privilege of being unashamed of the power of God, the gospel.

Thank you for this conference. Thank you for those who have convened it. Thank you for all that it represents.

There's a vast potential in going forward. Send us out in the power of your name, we pray, for Jesus' sake.

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