

The Principles of Paul

by Peter Maiden

Peter Maiden shares his personal story of transformation and the principles of Paul's conviction and experience that make the gospel powerful.

Duration: 50:53

Scripture: Romans 1:1-3, Romans 1:5-6, Galatians 1:6, Galatians 1:11

Topics: "Principles"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses four reasons why the Gospel is important. The first reason is that the Gospel is the story of what God has done for sinners. The second reason is that the Gospel is the message of God, and it is a privilege to share this message with others. The third reason is the power of the Gospel, which is greater than any earthly power. The fourth reason is the beauty of the Gospel, which is seen in the incarnation and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The speaker emphasizes the everlasting consequences of the Gospel and encourages the listeners to participate in summer campaigns to share this life-changing message with others.

Transcript

I was born into a very strict, spiritual Plymouth Brethren home. It was an old-fashioned type of home, still is actually. Every morning before breakfast we had family worship.

And every night before I went to bed, literally I sat on my mother's knee, it's the first thing I can remember in life, that I was taught the scriptures, I was taught verses from the Bible. And I was brought up in this Brethren tradition. By the time I was 12 or 13 I was being taken away by senior men every Sunday night and taking part in services.

At the age of 14 I preached my first sermon. And I was regularly preaching when I was 14 and a half, 15 years of age. I look back on some of those messages now, and it scares me stiff to think of some of the things I used to say in those days.

But that's the kind of home it was, it was very spiritual, it was very efficient. And sadly I became very, very arrogant as a teenager. I thought by the time I was 16 that I knew it all.

I'd been preaching then for almost two years, so I really thought I was experienced. It was about 16 that I heard for the first time about Operation Mobilization. And what I heard didn't thrill me at all.

I heard about these wretched old vehicles which were breaking down all over Europe. I heard about teams running out of money and food within about two days of leaving the base. Actually, in the very early days of OM, 1963 I think it was, we had a huge team came to my home city in the north of England.

And they actually worked in a small village just outside the city. The village only had 90 inhabitants, 90. And by the end of a one-week campaign they wrote a prayer letter to which spoke of 60 converts in this village of 90 people.

And I remember the elders of my church going to do the follow-up and they couldn't find one of the 60 a week after the team had left. And I can remember them shaking their heads like this and saying, youthful enthusiasm. And so I grew up thinking that OM was a very immature operation.

And when I was 17 I decided I would go on OM and really my decision was I would go to give them the benefit of my experience. That's why I came on OM. Seriously, that's why I came on OM.

I've heard of this fellow Werwer or something like that. It sounded to me as though he was in desperate need of help. Looking at him I thought he was in desperate need of food as well.

So I came as a 17-year-old. I thought they would have heard of me, you know, in advance of my coming. But I was surprised when I got to Belgium that there was no special treatment on my arrival.

We were taken to this very large warehouse. This was before the days of beautiful campsites. And in this long, long room in this warehouse, cement floor, there were cornflake packets.

Not the small packets but the large boxes in which the small packets come. These boxes had been flattened and they were lying all along the walls of this big room. And I was introduced to one of these cornflake packets and told it was my bed.

I was sure the word would get through about who I was but I accepted the bed. And you know that first week of the conference they never asked me to speak once. And after a week at this conference where actually I was tremendously challenged through the ministry, I went to Spain, two vans of us went to Spain.

And the van that I travelled in, everybody spoke Spanish apart from me. And by the time I got to Spain I was feeling desperately lonely. But when I got to Spain there was a very bright young Mexican fellow called Pepe who was my team leader.

He must have come up to about here on me I would guess. But he was a lively young chap and I thought we'd get on well. And he came to me after two days in Valencia in Spain and he said, Pepe, I think I should share with you for prayer that we don't have any money.

You know we'd just left Belgium about three days ago and we'd already run out of money. By the way this never happens today because you go away with at least three and a half days. But then this fellow, this Mexican chap, he said, you know we don't have any food either.

I said, what are we going to do? And then he said this, we're going to get on our knees here in Valencia, we were in the main street in Valencia, and we're going to remind God of his promises. And he said yes and before I could stop him he was on his knees, Valencia! And I'll never forget this little Mexican voice. My God shall supply all your needs.

And my mind went back to my mother's knee actually. I wanted to be back on my mother's knee but my mind went back to my mother's knee. I learned that verse when I was a child.

You know I never had the opportunity to actually prove that it was true or not. Because of the kind of home I was brought up in, everything was provided for. And quite literally as I look back on my life, that was one of the great turning points on that street in Valencia.

It's a great crisis for me, was this book really the living word of God? Or was it just another collection of religious writings? Could it be trusted in practice? And of course we did see God provide for two and a half months down there in Valencia. Sometimes in most remarkable ways we saw God provide. And a great thing happened in my Christian life.

A lot came from my head down to my heart and to my experience. Well I was there for two and a half months in Valencia. And if I'm honest I would have to say that the first two months were some of the most miserable months of my life.

This is just to encourage you on the first night of this conference. I can actually remember getting on top of a flat roof building in Valencia and pleading with God to get me out of here. You're looking really encouraged.

The reason it was so painful for me was this. There was a lot of pride and arrogance and God had to deal with it. But I look back to those last two weeks, the two weeks of the most marvellous weeks of my Christian life.

God had rooted out, He'd pulled down as He told Jeremiah to do. And now that at least some of that pride and arrogance was gone, God could begin to build in my own life. I get very excited about these summer campaigns because that 1967 summer campaign for me was a life changing experience.

And I believe in one or two months time many of you will be able to give a similar testimony. It'll be different from mine because you'll be coming from, you know, a different position to it. But I think my experience helps us to understand what these OM summer campaigns are all about.

And for me they're all about three things. Number one, through God's word and through prayer and through the many experiences, I believe these summer campaigns bring you into a deeper knowledge of God. That's what these summers are all about.

If you don't go away from this summer campaign with a deeper knowledge, living knowledge of God, I feel it will have been a failure. And then secondly, I believe these summer campaigns help to bring us into a deeper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. And the marvellous thing is that while all of that's going on in our own lives, I believe you'll find yourself making a significant contribution to the evangelism of Europe.

All this was going on around me in Spain in 1967. A church was actually being founded. We were working in a town just south of Valencia where there was no evangelical church at all.

And by the grace of God that little team was used to found an evangelical church which is still going on today. That's what these summers are all about. God doing something in our lives and at the same time through our lives a significant evangelistic contribution can be made on the continent of Europe.

Now let's turn to God's word together. And I want to read to you from Romans chapter 1. We're going to read the first 17 verses. I'll read in English and if you can follow in your own language, I'd appreciate that.

Romans chapter 1, verse 1. Call 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 name's sake 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 opened 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 am 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. But 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. The city of Rome was the great center of power and philosophy at the time when the apostle Paul wrote these words. And yet here in verse 15 Paul says I am eager to go right into the heart of Rome, the center of power to preach the gospel.

And in the next verse, verse 16 he says I am not ashamed of the gospel and that actually means I am proud of the gospel. I want to ask you all this evening whether you share Paul's pride in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are you honored, are you privileged to be an ambassador of this gospel? Or deep down, if you are honest, do you have doubts? Many doubts concerning the priority of the gospel.

Is the simple gospel really the great need in a society so riddled with injustice and poverty? Or maybe you have doubts concerning the intellectual credibility of the gospel. This evening at the close of this first day of our conference, I just want us to look very briefly at five reasons why Paul was so proud of the gospel. And the first is Paul's own experience.

Look at verse 1. Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle set apart for the gospel. That sentence must have spoken volumes to his readers. This man used to be Saul of Tarsus, the terrorizer of the church.

But now he is calling himself a servant, a doulos of Jesus Christ. I want you to turn just for a moment to the first chapter of Galatians. The reason why Paul wrote this epistle to the Galatians is that there were false prophets who were troubling the churches which Paul had been instrumental in founding.

And you can say in verse 6, Paul speaks about those who are deserting the gospel. I want you to notice how Paul deals with this problem. Look at verse 11 first of all, Galatians 1.11. He says, I want you to know the gospel is not something that man made up.

And then in verse 13 he immediately begins to talk about his own experiences. You've heard of my previous way of life, he says, in Judaism. He mentions his persecution of the church.

He mentions his own religious zeal and so on. Now why does Paul speak about these things? He is making this very simple point. He is saying to the Galatians, what power could have changed a man like me? Could some human philosophy have changed Saul of Tarsus to Paul, the doulos of Jesus Christ? Paul is saying, this is why I am so convinced about the gospel.

I've known its power in my own experience. And this is an indispensable qualification for the service of God. A personal experience of the power of God in our own lives.

Paul is saying, my gospel is good news because it's been good news to me. He is saying, my gospel is the power of God and I've known its power in my own life. So when Paul presented the gospel, he didn't just present a formula of words and of doctrine.

But he presented something which was his own living experience of God. Do you know that's why we have these days of conference before we move out into the work of God? Those of us who are organizing this conference and ministering at this conference. A feeling that individually and together we will have a fresh experience of the power of God amongst us.

I trust you are praying as you move around this conference and in your own quiet times. Lord, come and visit us by your spirit in these days together. When we move out for you Lord, we don't want to just move out with a formula of words, however correct.

But we want to be able to present something from our own experience of you. If you go back to Romans chapter 1, you'll find that Paul's experience was more than conversion. We've seen that he calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ.

I've already said the Greek word there is the word which we've named our second ship in OM by. It's the word doulos. When you read through the writings of Paul, you'll find that his favorite title for Jesus is the title Lord.

The Greek word there is kurios. It's a word which describes someone who has undisputed possession of something. The opposite of the word kurios is the word doulos.

A doulos is someone who has bowed beneath the ownership of the Lord, of the kurios. You remember when Paul was on the Damascus road. He saw that bright shining light.

He tells us in Acts chapter 22, something that you don't read in the actual account of the incident. Something of the conversation which went on just outside Damascus. Paul's first question was, who are you, Lord? Who are you, kurios? Jesus explained to Saul exactly who he was.

Paul's immediate response to that was this, Lord, what do you want me to do? Right from the moment of his conversion, Paul bowed before the Lordship of Jesus Christ. He's proud from that moment on to describe himself as a slave of the Lord Jesus. If you look again at Romans 1 and verse 1, you'll see something further.

He wasn't only converted, he didn't only immediately accept the Lordship of Christ. But as part of that, he saw that he was set apart for the gospel of God. Just outside Damascus, when Paul said to Jesus, what do you want me to do? Jesus said, go and find Ananias.

And that man described to Saul of Tarsus what his future ministry would be. He told Saul that Jesus had a specific assignment for him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. And that was something else which right from the moment of his conversion, Paul rejoiced in.

He knew Christ, he knew what it was to be a servant of Christ, and he knew what it was to have a specific task to do in the service of the Lord Jesus. Now in verse 5 of Romans 1, Paul tells us more about this apostolic call. He says, through Christ we've received two things, grace and apostleship.

Now those two things are absolutely essential and they're essential together. Apostleship was the task, the task the risen Christ had given him to do. Grace was the means by which he would perform that task.

Now Paul went through many low times in his Christian experience, there's no question about that. It would appear that from time to time he questioned his own competence, he questioned his own ability. But through it all he held on to these two convictions.

Number one, God has called me, I'm his apostle. Number two, he has given me his grace. If you're anything like me when I was 17 and a half years of age, you're worried about the next month.

Worried about standing before that first door in a country you may never have visited before. You're worried about keeping going for three weeks. You're worried about some of the food you might find yourself eating.

I don't know what your particular worries are. But I hope you can hold on as Paul did throughout his life to these two truths. When God calls he gives the grace to fulfill the call.

And I believe that all of you or almost all of you will end this crusade rejoicing in the sufficiency of the grace of Jesus Christ. I'm writing letters to some of you. How did it go? Did you enjoy the summer campaign? Very often we get the same answer.

Well, enjoy wouldn't be the word I would choose. But I can't begin to tell you what I've learned. And I can't begin to tell you how much I've known what it is to be drawn closer to God and to draw on the reserves of grace that there is there.

So that was Paul's first reason for being proud of the gospel. He'd known the dramatic power of that gospel in his own life. Now very very briefly let me give you the other four reasons.

The second reason is that Paul saw the gospel as the gospel of God as you can see here in verse 1. The gospel, the God spell, the God story. Simply it's the story which tells us what God has done for sinners. Think of some of the lengths that people have gone to make their message to the world known.

Some of you will have heard of the famous missionary C.T. Studd. Founder of the Worldwide Evangelistic Crusade, one of the great missionary organizations in our world. It was an article written by an atheist that inspired C.T. Studd to his missionary career.

Let me just read you the first part of that article, just the first couple of sentences. This is an atheist writing. If I firmly believed, as millions say they do, that the knowledge and practice of religion in this life influences destiny in another, then religion would mean everything to me.

I'd cast away earthly enjoyments as dross. Earthly cares as foolishness. Earthly thoughts and feelings as vanity.

Religion would be my first waking thought. It would be my last image before sleep sank me into unconsciousness. And I would labor in the cause of religion alone.

C.T. Studd couldn't get those words out of his mind. He was one of the great motivating forces which produced the Worldwide Evangelistic Crusade. I suppose one of the questions we have to ask ourselves is, do we really believe this message is the message of God? Do we really believe that this is what God wants to say to the people of France and Belgium and Britain and so on? Another English atheist once said, if I believed what you Christians say you believe, I'd crawl across Britain on broken glass to save just one soul from your hell.

Do we really believe that our gospel is the gospel of God? David Brainard did. He was a missionary to the Indians of North America. Gave his life as a young man in that cause.

In his diary he wrote these simple words. I didn't care how I lived. I didn't care for one moment what trials I had to endure.

My one concern was to gain souls for Christ. The second reason why Paul was so proud of his gospel. I've known its power in my own life, he says.

It's the gospel of God. And then thirdly, he was proud of it because of the origins of the gospel. Look at verse 2. The gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures.

The Christian gospel is not some nine day wonder. And he's also emphasizing again here that it's not something that he himself has dreamed up. Our message is the message of Abraham.

It's the message of David. The Old Testament contains the promises of the message. The New Testament shows how these promises were being fulfilled and would be fulfilled in the future.

It's the message for all of history. Now Paul is also going to show in these next three chapters that it's the message for all of humanity. He tells us in the first three chapters it's for the educated and it's for the uneducated.

It's for the religious and it's for the non-religious. He tells us it's for all races. I wonder if you appreciate the privilege you have as you move out from this conference.

You're holding in your hands and on your lips and I trust in your heart the message of God which is for all of history and which is for all people. And then his fourth reason is the beauty of the gospel. Look at verses 3 and 4. The gospel is regarding or concerning his son.

As to his human nature he was a descendant of David. And through the spirit of holy mercy he was declared with power to be the son of God by his resurrection. And there you have the two essential elements of the gospel.

The elements which also show the sheer beauty of the gospel. You have the incarnation and you have the resurrection. The incarnation, he was a descendant of David.

He was a real man, not a legendary figure. He wasn't a demigod, he wasn't half God and half man. The writer to the Hebrews says he was tempted in every point just as we are.

One of the early church fathers put it magnificently. He said Jesus became what we are to make us what he is. Now this is beautiful.

It's so different from all the other religions of history and of today. The gods of history and the gods of many of today's religions are far removed from the people. They are untouchable and they are untouched by human sorrow and need.

And here is something entirely and magnificently different. A God who chooses to become one of us. We are told he was made like his brothers in every way.

The great God has become what we are. But the beauty of the gospel doesn't stop there, does it? As we were hearing this morning, this great God then allows the very creatures he made to nail him to a cross. You see, that's the beauty of the gospel.

It's a gospel which will not allow for injustice. It would be unjust, unjust for God just to give blanket forgiveness. That would be unholy, unjust.

The beauty of the gospel, the holiness of God is that God is willing to pierce his own son in order that his holiness might be maintained. We see in verse 17 in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed. Thank God the gospel doesn't end there.

It doesn't end with the beauty of the incarnation. It doesn't end with the marvelous sacrifice of Calvary. We read the second element of the gospel.

He was declared with power to be the son of God by his resurrection. And that leads us to the final reason why Paul was so proud of this message. And that was because of the power of the gospel.

Not just in his own life as we've seen, but the power of the gospel for everyone who would believe. Dr. Nygren writes, the gospel is not the presentation of an idea, it's the operation of a power. When you preach, when you present the gospel, you are letting loose an incalculable power.

If you were here this afternoon listening about the various countries you can go to this summer, you would have seen examples of that. Tracts containing scripture left in a home, and yet there's dynamic power in the written living word of God. Remember Paul is in the center of power.

He's in Rome itself. He says, I'm eager to come because my power is greater than the power of Rome, the power of my gospel. And it was superior to Roman power on at least two levels.

First of all, it's the power of God for salvation. It has everlasting consequences, this power. Rome with all its power, just like every other empire, would one day be vanquished.

But God's word will abide forever. The seed which you will plant this summer abides forever. And secondly, it's superior to Roman power because as we've seen earlier, it's for all people.

It's for the Jew first, says Paul, but not exclusively, it's for the Greeks also. It's for the non-Greeks, it's for the wise, it's for the unwise. How superior to human Roman power was the power of the gospel.

Earthly armies destroy the power of the gospel. This is why Paul was so eager to come to Rome. I've known its power in my own life.

It's not a human philosophy, it's the gospel of God. It's a gospel for all of history, it's a gospel for all of humanity. It's the most beautiful message known to man.

Its power is greater, superior to any earthly power. I'll just close by looking at one further phrase. In verse 15 we've seen Paul saying that he's eager to preach the gospel at Rome.

But in verse 14 he says, I'm bound, bound to preach this gospel. Paul is saying, I sense obligation to preach the gospel. It's my privilege, but it's also my obligation.

Don't you sense obligation tonight? God has saved me, though I was so unworthy of His salvation. Christ died for me when I was so utterly rebellious. He's gone on loving and He's gone on forgiving me throughout my Christian life.

And right now He's preparing heaven for me. All this He has done and He is doing for me. Surely I am under obligation to make the message concerning His love known throughout the world.

I hope you're going to go away from this conference in a few days feeling a sense of honor to carry it with you. And even through those times when you might not feel that sense of privilege, you might not sense that honor. I trust you'll sense your obligation to keep on proclaiming the word.

Let's pray together. Let's take a few minutes to allow God's word, or a few seconds to allow God's word to rest in our hearts and in our minds. Thank you that we're not going anywhere this summer in our own strength.

We don't have very much confidence in our own ability, in our own intellect. But Lord, our confidence is in you. And we're thrilled, Lord.

We just want to say we're thrilled with this message you've given us. We thank you it's not a theory. We thank you that it's based on historical realities.

We thank you that Jesus, your Son, has lived amongst us. He knows our pain. We thank you that he has died upon this earth.

He has shed his blood for our sins. Lord, it's not a theory, it's reality. And we thank you that it's just as real, that he rose again and he's alive today and he'll never die again.

Lord, this is the heart. And we want to pray right now, Lord, that you will make us the kind of people who can be instruments to make this message known. Give us confidence in you and in your Gospel.

Grant us wholeness in our own lives. Grant us to know the filling of your Holy Spirit. That we might present this Gospel in the power of your Spirit.

Lord, we pray that many will be rejoicing around Europe as this message turns them upside down by your Spirit. We thank you for our day together with you. In Jesus' name.

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