

The Church in Biblical Perspective: The Ekklesia – God’s Church for the Ages: His Gospel—Our Proclamation

Romans 1:16, 17

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January 23, 2010 – Morning Sermon

I want to look at our text for this study in Romans 1. The mission, vision and strategy of the church are listed at the bottom of this transcript for your keeping and prayer list. This is the Word of God. It’s the truth. Romans 1:16-17 says 16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

The grass withers and the flower fades. The Word of our God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may this be preached for you.

In the Old Testament reading that was read earlier in the service there was a seeming contradiction in the text or at least a seeming tension. God says to Moses, “I am a God of mercy, grace, compassion, and loving kindness to save thousands upon thousands” and the next verse said “I will by no means leave the guilty unpunished” (Exodus 34:5-7). Okay God how are we going to pull this one off, because we’re all guilty. In fact, Moses goes on to say it in the text; “God, we need Your mercy and grace because I am a stiff necked guy with a bunch of stiff necked people and we need Your pardon for our iniquity.” We are a sinful people. How can we be saved and You still be holy, just and righteous? You will be no means leave the guilty unpunished, so how can You be just and then justify and pardon sinners and yet still be just and every sin still receive its recompense? How is that possible?

There is good news. When there was no way God found a way and made a way. The way is His Son Jesus. It was not just a plan but it was a Man. God sent His Son into the world and His Son goes to the cross. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. So when there was no way, God made a way and that way is His Son who is The Way, the Truth, the Life and no man comes to the Father but through Him. God has found a way to be just and gracious. As His Son became our substitute He took upon Himself our sins that we might be forgiven if we by faith and

repentance put our trust in Him alone. God found a way. He is gracious, loving kindness, holy and righteous. That way is His Son Jesus Christ. That's why the Apostle Paul said in I Corinthians 15, "When I came to you at Corinth, I was there 18 months with you. I had that Good News message. In fact I delivered to you that message of first importance. There are some other things that are important but the first of the first things is the Gospel. I delivered to you that which is of first importance that according to the Scriptures Christ was born, He died, He was raised, and He ascended to the Father. He now intercedes for us and He saves sinners. All according to the Scriptures, God said He was going to do it. God has done it. Praise the Lord! In fact if you need some witnesses there are about 500 at the Sea of Galilee. They are all around, go ask them because most of them are still living now." It is a historical fact, a Biblical truth and it is Good News that God made the Way.

You may be reading this today and you're asking is there a way that I can have eternal life. I have good news for you. There is a way you can have eternal life. There is only one way. Jesus doesn't allow this poppycock that He's a good teacher. He's the Lord and Savior of sinners and it's the biggest decision you'll ever make in your life. O God, pour contempt upon all my pride that I will humble myself and come to You who is the giver of life. As I survey the cross where He bore my sins that my God graciously could save me, oh the deep, deep love of Jesus.

Why are we going back to this matter of being Gospel driven as a church and as Christians? There are many reasons why. We are kind of going back to the basics. We are coming out of 50 years of celebrating God's goodness to us in this last year of jubilee. We are going into the next 50 or until Jesus comes again. What is it that can make us as individuals and a church courageous and yet contrite, bold yet humble, convicted and conviction yet compassionate and gracious? What is it that can call us to worship that's God centered, evangelism that is passionately seeking the lost, loving for people to come to the One that they need, Jesus Christ, and keep us discipling people? What is it that can keep up on message on mission in ministry as we move to the future?

We haven't come up with a new mission. We still have the same mission which comes from the same passages of Scripture. We're not going to change it. We are moving into the next 50 years for God's glory, Briarwood is committed to **EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS** to worship God and reach Birmingham to reach the world for Christ. The vision takes on even more clarity as we move forward. To stay on mission, on message in ministry there are three things in our vision. It is for Coming Generations, Briarwood desires to be a Christ-centered, Gospel-driven, Spirit-filled **EQUIPPING CENTER** where every member is a minister (of worship to God, the Gospel to the lost, love to one another and the grace of God in our own lives) and a missionary. We need that continually in our lives to be Christ centered, Gospel driven, Spirit filled, an equipping community of believers to move forward so that we can fulfill that mission. How do we want to view the

church? It's God's church, it's our home. That was our first study. It is Christ's church which He purchased with His own blood and it's our home. Ephesians 2 says the church is the household of God built upon the foundations of the Apostles and Prophets. Christ is the cornerstone. It is His church, our home until Christ comes again to take us to the home He is preparing for us, a new heavens and a new earth. Until that day this is our home, His church. It's God's family that I am a part of. He says "I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It is His church and it becomes our home.

The second thing we learned in our last study is therefore since it is His church we have to be Christ centered. It's His preeminence. The glory of God is revealed in the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. All things came into existence through Him and for Him. He saves sinners in Him alone. He is the Creator, the Redeemer and He upholds all things by the Word of His power. So His preeminence has become our passion that Jesus Christ is the center, the sum, the substance, and the circumference of every believer and every church that keeps us courageous, convicted, compassionate, bold, and humbled. When we are Christ centered our eyes are fixed on Jesus who is the Author and Perfector of our faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross that cross I survey where the wondrous love of Christ was sent to save me the sinner. It is there that Christ becomes the center and we stay focused on that.

We are not Briarwood centered. We're not discipleship centered. We're not evangelism centered. Harry, are you putting all that aside? Absolutely not. We are Christ centered and that's what gives us worship. We are Christ centered so now we have something to evangelize and someone and a reason to evangelize. We are Christ centered and we are reaching disciples for Christ. Whose church is it? It is Christ's church. Who loved His church? Christ loved His church. Who gifted His church? Christ gifted His church. Who gave the Holy Spirit to us? Christ gave the Holy Spirit to us. Who is the Holy Spirit pointing us to? He is pointing us to Christ. What Gospel do we preach? We preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He purchased the church, He loves the church, and He'll take the church to glory. It is Christ the center, the sum, the substance, and the circumference. For to me to live is Christ. Christ now invigorates and impassions everything.

What is it that drives us and empowers us? That is what we are looking at in this study. It's the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Why is the church Gospel driven? It is because the Gospel is the foundation of the church, it's the formation of the church, and it is the motivation of the church. Christ builds His church on the foundation of the Gospel. It is how we can be right with God. He keeps us on track. How does He keep worship God centered? How does He keep evangelism going, sinners being saved? How is that we stay focused on making disciples for Christ and not disciples of a preacher or a church? How is it that we're able to maintain God centered worship and effective evangelism? How is it that we're able to do mercy ministries that really count, not for people to draw attention to

ourselves but for people to feel, see and experience the compassion and love of Christ personally delivered by people? It is when we are Christ centered and driven by the Gospel.

In the next study we'll look at what it means to be Spirit filled because that is the only way that this is accomplished but this study is all about being Gospel driven. The Gospel is the foundation, the formation and it drives us, impassions us and is our motivation. Have you ever noticed who the most excited Christians in evangelism and worship are? It's not the ones that know the most. It's probably the ones that know the least because they are the ones that just got saved but they are excited about the Gospel. They have the first things right and they haven't know enough other things to lose the first things. They are still amazed at grace and they are still moving forward. The Gospel is the foundation, formation and the motivation of the Christian life.

I want to give you one Gospel truth just to nail down in this study and it is the Gospel is the glorious message that God's grace has overcome our sin through the perfect life, atoning death, triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ, His Son, our Savior. Through Him we have been ransomed, redeemed and reconciled to Him, this wonderful cross of Christ. That is why Paul said, "I determined to know nothing among you but Christ and Him crucified." Did Paul preach on church government? Absolutely. I told people to shepherd the church? He laid down His life. We are back to Jesus and the Bible. Didn't He teach on the family? Absolutely. I told men to love their wives. How? As Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. What about the sacraments? You are going to look at the body and blood of the Lord displayed which is Christ's love for you and poured out for you. What about baptism? I'm going to remind you of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Everything that is here finds its center, sum, substance and circumference in Christ and it is empowered by the Good News that God has made a way to make us right with Him so that we are now reconciled to Him. God demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. If you're reading this today and you're looking that's the only thing I have to offer you but boy what a glorious thing I have to offer you which is Jesus. He'll take you right where you are and He'll never leave you right where you are and He'll take you to glory to be with Him. He'll never leave you nor forsake you. He begins a good work in you and He'll finish it until the day of Christ Jesus so please come to Him. Don't make any other deals.

We're going to start our study in the book of Genesis tonight and Eve said, "God is pretty good but I think I'll take the fruit." Esau said, "Yeah this God must be something but I'd rather have soup." So what is your price to display our pride and reject the Gospel? One might think, "I don't want Jesus. I want to give my life to buying cars" or money or power or sexual immorality. So will it be Jesus or sexual promiscuity? I wonder which one I'll take. I want to offer you Jesus Christ.

Everything over there is empty and brings death. He loves you and will loosen you from your sins. He will give you life ever more but He's not an option. He is the way, the truth and the life and He has come for you to ransom you, redeem you and to reconcile you.

I've always struggled on how to communicate this to people because I want you to see this. There is this thing called the cross where Jesus Christ went and established the Good News of the Gospel. It's at that cross that you see the sinfulness of man because there are a couple of things that you see at the cross. The first thing you see is here is the one time you can use the phrase 'hell on earth.' Right then all of hell was poured upon the cross. "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) For on that cross all of the wrath of God was poured out upon Jesus and He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He drank that cup to the bottom so that you could drink the cup of life evermore. Right there at the cross you see just how sinful we are. It was the only time in history that men had God where men could put their hands on Him and they crucified Him. That's the heart that you and I are born with. It's a Christ killing heart but Jesus went to that cross and died for our sins and at that cross the love of God met the holiness of God and sinners are saved and reconciled to God for the glory of God and joy upon joy for us.

Ransomed, redeemed and reconciled – I struggle with how to communicate those three 'r's' all the time but I have an illustration that I have used before so if you don't mind this is kind of like my green chair story. It is how I remember the Gospel. He paid the ransom to redeem me to reconcile me to the Father through Him and He has given me the ministry and message of reconciliation. A year or so ago we had all these gas prices going up and one of these grocery stores began to offer people "If you come buy groceries here for five weeks and spend this much we'll give you a coupon and you can go to any service station and redeem it and get some gas." That just didn't click with me but the one that I remember is when I was about 11 or 12 years old. Friday night comes and my mother says "Get in the car" and we go to the A and P. That was a grocery store that meant Atlantic and Pacific and if you had any sense you bought your groceries there and everything had Ann Page on it. We would go there and my mom would buy the groceries. I had to go for two reasons.

Number one was I had to carry the bags in and out so that she wouldn't have to give 25 cents to a bag boy and number two was I had a job when we got home. I am about to take a trip to a museum for some of you. When you bought your groceries back then you would go the counter and a lady would actually punch in the price in a cash register and you can see these at the museums. After the total came up my mother would go down the list to make sure everything was right and then the lady would turn and go to a smaller cash register that was green where she would punch in the total and out of the back like magic would come

rolls of green stamps. You can find those in the museum too. The deal was when you bought groceries they would give you green stamps that you would put in a book and after you collected 7,000 green stamps you would get a can opener. That's the way it worked.

When we got home I would get job number two. Mother would sit me at the table and say "Here's the stamps. Here's the books. Go to work." I had to lick all of the sheets of stamps and put them in the books. One time when I was 18 years old I went into a post office and I saw them with this bowl that had water and a sponge to use for wetting stamps. I thought "Why didn't my mother tell me that?" She made me lick all of them. I don't know how many diseases I got from doing that. I knew one thing that when I'd get up after doing that I couldn't talk. Now maybe that's why she did it because my mouth was stuck together when I was through. After we got our 10, 15, 20 thousands books we'd put them in the back of the car and go to 438 Pecan Avenue in Charlotte, North Carolina to the S and H Green Stamp Redemption Center. We would put our 10,000 books up on the counter. They would scrape them off into a basket. The lady would go get the can opener, bring it back and we'd take it home.

I know that's trivial but that's just the best way I can explain it to you. Two thousand years ago there was Good News. I'm all wrong with God and I can't save myself but there is One that went to the cross for me and He put Himself on the counter of God's justice and He ransomed me. He paid the price. Then He redeemed me and by the Holy Spirit I've been brought from the shelf of sin to Christ. Now He is going to take me home, reconciled to Him. That is the message we have and that's what drives everything in this church. It drives our worship, our evangelism, our mercy, our discipleship, it drives everything.

I want to give you five Gospel facts from Romans 1:16. The first part of Romans 1:16 says "*For I am not ashamed of the gospel...*" It is not 'a' Gospel but it is *the* Gospel. It is called a definite article. It is not the indefinite article which would be 'a' Gospel but it is the Gospel. There is something definitive. Jesus Christ died according to the Scriptures. He was raised according to the Scriptures. It's Biblical, it's historical, it's a fact, it's absolutely definitive and people have got to hear that. People are not going to heaven because they see your changed life or because they are your friend. They go to heaven through Christ and they come to Christ by faith. They get faith from hearing the Word of God. It is through the foolishness of the message proclaimed that we are being saved. There is something definitive called the Gospel that we have to communicate to people. When we leave here you have to communicate it.

Coming up is the Sportsman's Blast. Nobody is going to heaven because they are going to the Sportsman's Blast but there will be somebody there who is going to share **the** Gospel. Then hopefully you who have brought them have been sharing with them **the** Gospel. So we have been planting, watering and cultivating and then God gives the increase. It is this thing called the message.

Secondly, Romans 1:16 says “...for it is the power of God...” The world hates it. The world laughs at it. Talk shows make fun of the Gospel. They ridicule it, mock it and all kinds of people love to do that but let me assure you that it is the power of God. Number three, it is the righteousness of God. Why is that important? It is because of God’s power that I can be forgiven of my sin. Jesus paid for all my sins yet while that shuts the gates of hell and I can’t go to hell because Jesus has already drank the cup of hell that I could be forgiven and pardoned, heaven is for the righteous. I have a problem. My righteousness is like filthy rags. I can’t get to heaven on my baptism or my church membership or my good intentions or my giving or my stewardship because it’s all polluted with my sin. So how can I get to heaven? Good news, He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God. I am cleansed by His blood. I am clothed with His righteousness. Every time God looks at me He sees the righteousness of God. Therefore I am forgiven and I am accepted through Christ.

Number four, the Gospel is inclusive. It is for any and all sinners. It is a trustworthy statement, Christ Jesus came into the world to save white ones? Black ones? Rich ones? Poor ones? Young ones? Old ones? Male ones? Females ones? Murderers? How about Moses, Paul and David? Religious terrorist? How about Paul? He saves sinners. We have a great God who saves sinners and you’re never so far away that He can’t save you and bring you to Himself. It is inclusive. Whosoever will may come, for we preach it to all the nations.

Number five, it is exclusive but it is only those who put their trust in Him that are saved because He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. If you flee to Jesus there’s a rock, a refuge and that Jesus has already paid the penalty for you. Therefore instead of being in the books and judged by my deeds, I’m in the Book of Life and saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. He is my strength, my hope and my all. It is only those who are in Christ that are saved. So please come to Him today. That is the message we have. That drives everything.

To be Christ centered? Whose Gospel is it? It’s Jesus’. What is the purpose of the Gospel? It is to tell people what Jesus did. What does the Gospel do? It brings you to Jesus because Jesus has come for you. It is a glorious message that empowers everything and there is one truth that I believe these facts bring home to us. Let me give this to you in a takeaway.

The last thing I want to mention to you is this. The Gospel reveals to us, and I have word-smithed this sum according to what Jack Miller said who was my professor at Westminster. The Gospel reveals to us that our sin is worse than we ever dared to imagine. You’re not sin sick, you’re sin dead. The wages of sin is death. I don’t know about you but I can get that out of the way before I get to Highway 280. Highway 280 will give me opportunity to sin in word, thought and

deed. I'm not only a sinner but I can't save myself. My sin is worse than I ever dare to imagine. It makes no sense. Why would you take fruit instead of God? Why would you walk away from your family instead of flee to Jesus? Why would you do that? It makes no sense but my sin is subtle and so deceiving but praise God that His grace is greater than my sin and it's greater than I ever dared to hope. He has paid for all of my sins and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I would like to conclude this study with three stories. I know when you preach the Gospel people are going to make fun of it. They do it all over the place but it's the power of God. Just cut it loose because it saves sinners. It reclaims marriages. It changes families, cultures, and nations. It is unbelievable. It is the power of God even while they are laughing and mocking. Some of you have heard this illustration but I want to give this right quick.

I was 16 years old and my dad was in minor league baseball. With that kind of salary there is a lot of month at the end of the money. So when I turned 16 it was "Happy birthday son, maybe we'll go to a ball game." My dad gets in free for all of those games so maybe that's what we'll do. My dad also said "Son, I have a car for you." I said, "A what?" He said, "I got a car for your 16th birthday. It's nine miles to school so you're going to drive it to school." I said, "Great, what kind of car did you get?" He said, "A 57 Ford." Some of you I need to transport back into another culture and another time. At my age in the 1960s if you couldn't get a 57 Thunderbird or a 57 Chevy then the third one you'd want would be a 57 Ford. I said, "No, Daddy you didn't really get that." He said, "Yes I did. I went down to the South Carolina State Highway Patrol and went to the auction. I got a South Carolina State interceptor and I got you a 57 Ford." I said, "Wow!"

I ran out the door, went around the corner and my face hit the ground. It was a 57 Ford and I turned to my Dad and said "I am not driving that to school. In fact, I'm not leaving the driveway with it." He said, "What's the matter son?" I said, "Daddy, it's pink." The car was pink. It had black fender skirts and a black hood and the rest was pink. Daddy looked at me and said "It's not pink son, its coral." I said, "Daddy at my high school they don't make a distinction between pink and coral. I am in a fist fight every day the rest of my life. This think is pink." My dad said, "I got it at an auction and I paid \$75." I said, "Did you pay them or did they pay you. Daddy, I can't do this." My daddy had a way of saying things that sounded as if they were in the Bible somewhere. It was just the way he said it. I'm still looking for this one. It's there, I know. Perhaps it's in Hezekiah 3:4 or something like that. He said, "Son, you're going to drive the car because a poor ride is better than a proud walk." That's in the Bible somewhere, I'm telling you. He went on to say "It's nine miles to that high school and you can walk it or drive this car. That's your choice."

He said further, "I'm going to help you just a little bit more. I want you to pick the hood up." So I picked the hood up. Inside was an engine that would actually be

built two years later but they had done it special for the South Carolina State Highway Patrol. This was an interceptor. I looked in and there was a 390 engine with two four barrels. I said, "Daddy I really like this coral car." I don't want to give any ideas to any kids here so I'm not going to give you any explanations except I will say that there were a lot of people who pulled up next to me in that car with corvettes, 57 Thunderbirds and 57 Chevys. They would look at my pink 57 Ford and laugh at it and I would just point straight ahead. They would laugh again and I would point again. I did not keep count of the number of corvettes that sucked up my exhaust pipe but there were a number of them.

So what's my point of this story? The world laughs but Briarwood is just going to pick up the hood because underneath the hood is the power of God to save sinners. Everything else destroys. He saves. I have to keep being reminded of that. So as I am being reminded of that God has been very gracious to me and I want to tell you something that God has very graciously done for me. I have served three churches and to remind me that worship, evangelism, discipleship, mercy and everything in the church has to be Christ centered and Gospel driven, God has been very gracious to me because I am a hard learner. He has been very gracious to me in teaching me. My first church was in Miami, Florida and Pinelands Presbyterian. The average age was 69 years of age and one lady had been 59 for ten years. In my congregation everybody ate dessert first. They may not be around until the end. Nobody bought green bananas because in one good flu season I was out of a church. There were no children. My three kids were the only kids in the church. Where do you start? My elders didn't know the Lord. They weren't even converted. I went to talk with a bunch of pastors and one was Terry Geiger and he looked at me and said "I think you need to start by preaching the Gospel." Bingo!

The first Sunday I was there I got to the end of the service and I went to the back to shake hands but nobody was there. They might have been 60 to 70 then but they were quick. I went out in the parking lot to stop people and shake their hands. I came back after shaking hands with some at five minutes after 12 and the doors were locked. I have to break in the door to get my keys in order to get my wife home. I said to my wife, "I don't think we're in Kansas anymore." Here are some people who are pretty much just checking the box when they come here on Sunday. They check it real quick. The next Sunday I preached from II Timothy 1:12 which is the Gospel. Paul is dying and he says "*But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.*" I got to the end of the service and I was going to give these 50 something people an opportunity to commit their life to Christ. The organist was supposed to play and she didn't. I thought, "Where has she gone?" I looked down at the front and there she was, right there in front of me. I can remember it today. Her name was Roxanne wearing a green chiffon dress with tears and laughter at the same time. She was a part of the Metropolitan Opera and head of the Florida International University Music department. She looks at me and says "I've been the organist for eight

years but I'm not a Christian. Could I become a Christian this morning?" I said, "Absolutely." I prayed with her and Cindy came down and prayed with her.

The chairman of the deacons met me before I got to the back of the church and he said to me with a red face, "Pastor, what were you doing down there?" I said, "Roxanne wanted to become a Christian." He said, "I thought that was what you were doing." I thought he was going to hit me. He said, "Listen I need to be one." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yeah! Can I go forward and do that next Sunday?" I said, "You don't have to go forward you can commit your life to Jesus right now." He said, "I knew you would say that. I have been chairman of the deacons for 14 years. I'm a hypocrite and I just want to go down there and tell everybody I'm committing my life to Jesus. Can I do that?" I said, "Absolutely."

Thursday I had gotten a phone call that Jack cut his thumb off with a power saw. I went to the hospital and they had just gotten microsurgical equipment. It was around 1980 right before the flood. Have you heard of the practice of medicine? That's what they did and he was the first one. They spent hours on him. They sewed everything together, put a button on the end of his thumb, tied it off, and wrapped everything up. The doctor told him "if you smell something then come back" and that wasn't real encouraging for Jack to hear. I went up to Jack and put my arms around him and I said "I want to tell you two things. One, you committed your life to Jesus and that makes you a target for Satan but God doesn't let Satan do anything that doesn't fit His purposes and God never says all things are good but God promised that all things work together for good. God has got a purpose for this in your life." I was about to find out what that was. On Sunday I stood to preach Christ and the Gospel and I looked in the back and Jack had come in right during the call to worship. He was sitting back there with Beth, his wife and I tell everybody that was my one time Billy Graham moment in my life. I could have stopped at any moment and said "I see that hand" and then I could have said "And the buses will wait for you." I have always wanted to do that. Jack had his hand up in the air, I finished the sermon and he comes forward. I put both arms around him to give him a big hug and I said "Jack, I didn't expect to see you here." He said, "Harry God could have allowed Satan to cut my arm off at the shoulder and I'd still been here today." It all starts today, the Gospel. There came Beth right behind him.

Remember those 55 people? 29, with no invitation, just stood and came to Christ. God brought life to a dead church. It was Gospel driven. There was no ingenious pastor. It was just preaching the Gospel. People come to Christ and it's a glorious day. Now down at that church is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic church reaching West Indians right there in Miami and as well as those who are from Miami. God did that. Then I was sent up to Charlotte. Briarwood sent me up to Charlotte with a whopping \$25,000 salary a year. I got there and began to do the ministry in a modular unit which is a double wide trailer with the wheels covered up. We had 38 people. We are supposed to plant a flagship church that plants a Presbytery. What do you need to do? Bingo, start with the Gospel. A lady comes

to me and says "Pastor, I'm divorcing my husband. He has run out on me five times, I have four boys and I need you to pray me through this." So Cindy and I walk through and I said "Marne, I'm going to do it but I'm going after your husband, is that alright? You don't mind that, do you?" She said, "No." We went after him, got him on the softball team and Steve became a Christian. Steve said, "You know Pastor, I think I would like to court Marne." I said, "You can court her. She doesn't have to marry you, but you can court her." So as he was being disciple he courted her. They decided to get married. Steve is up there in the financial industry at the VP level so I knew when we were going to have the marriage there would be a lot of CEOs, COOs and CFOs and all those type of people were going to be there.

By this time we had left the modular unit and were in a metal gymnasium where we had these chairs we called widow makers. They were plastic with plastic legs and anybody with a certain weight would just disappear while I was preaching. They would just go straight down. I told Steve I didn't think he wanted to invite those people here to the gym and he said "Well, we worship here, so why can't we do our wedding here?" So we did it. Steve and Marne both gave their testimony with all four of their boys up there doing the wedding. They shared the Gospel, praise the Lord! It was a great wedding. After the wedding was over I got a phone call from a man named Harvey. Harvey said "Harry, I work with Steve and he's been telling me about Jesus and the Gospel. I went to that wedding and I have never seen a wedding like that in my life. Can I talk with you about that?" I said, "Sure, meet me at the Chateau Restaurant." We met there and I pulled out a napkin and asked him two questions, then I wrote down three things – your situation, God's solution and your salvation. I explained those three things and then said "Harvey is there any reason why you shouldn't receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" He said, "No." I said, "Why don't we do that?" So he prayed, stuck the napkin in his pocket and he still carried that napkin in his Bible to this day.

He went back to his apartment. He had a girl living there where they called it 'living without the benefit of the clergy.' He said to her, "I'm a Christian now so you have to move out." She said, "You're crazy." He said, "I'm a Christian and you have to move out." She said, "What kind of cult are you in." He said, "I'm going to this Christ Covenant Church." She came that next Sunday to that gymnasium and sat in those plastic chairs. She told me later, "I knew you were going to bring a box of snakes out any minute." She got mad, had red hair, red face and red everything. She had to go out by me and I shook her hands and introduced her to Miriam and Miriam led her to Christ. Long story short, she becomes a Christian, Harvey and Beth become counseled and courted and they got married back in the metal gymnasium.

Remember Harvey works with Steve so all the same CEOs and COOs are all back for their wedding. We do the wedding, they share their testimony and the next week I get a phone call saying, "Harry, my name is Dan and I work with

Steve and Harvey. They have been telling me about the Gospel and Jesus and I have never seen weddings like that before, can I talk to you about that?" I said, "Sure meet me at the Chateau Restaurant." We met at the restaurant, I pulled out a napkin, asked him two questions, wrote down three things and shared it with him. I said, "Dan is there any reason why you shouldn't receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior?" He said, "Absolutely not, let's do that." Dan committed his life to Jesus Christ. His wife had left him and I wished I could tell you that she came back but she did not. God did give him another wife named Kris. They got married, adopted four kids from Russia raising them in and for Jesus Christ. I get a phone call and this guy's name was Joe. Joe said "Harry, I work with Steve, Harvey and Dan and they have been telling me about Jesus and the Gospel. I went to their weddings and I have never seen weddings like that before, can I talk to you about that?" I said, "Absolutely, meet me at the Chateau Restaurant, bring a napkin they're out." I asked two questions, wrote down three things, he committed his life to Christ. He went home and led his wife Betty to Christ. Betty became president of the women of the church. He became president of the men of the covenant. Harvey became an elder and he and Beth ran our evangelism ministry. Dan and Kris, Kris became a teacher in our covenant day school and they helped us plant our first church. Dan and Kris helped us bring in the Bethany Adoption Agency and the Crisis Pregnancy Center. Steve is now the President of Reformed Theological Seminary and his wife is the superintendent of covenant day school with 1100 students. Do you get the picture?

That's the power of the Gospel. God taught me in Miami. God taught me in Charlotte about being Christ centered and Gospel driven. My bigger deal is just do it and get out of the way. Harry, you said you had three churches? I've been the pastor at Briarwood since 1999 and God is teaching me here all the time. There is the Sportsman Blast coming up and that will be giving the Gospel but you have to bring people to it that you are sharing the Gospel with. We have a Bridge to Life class to train you to share the Gospel. We have Evangelism Explosion. There is so much.

Let me just tell you what God taught me here early on. It is so crucial that the Gospel drives us in worship, evangelism and discipleship. I was taught this in a very special way. Our EE (Evangelism Explosion) teams that were doing the training when I first came here, went out one Wednesday night and I'll never forget the report they came back with. The report said they had ran out of visitors so we went to some apartments and did the survey. A couple of people knocked on a door and a man came to the door holding a can of beer drinking it. He told them they could come in and do the survey. He asked them if they wanted a beer and our guy said, "No, I don't think so but can I ask you a couple of questions?" He said, "Sure." Another fellow came out of a back bedroom and kind of sheepishly sits down. They share the Gospel and the one guy keeps making fun of them and making fun of the Gospel but the power is there. They lifted the hood. When it was all over the other guy said "I'd like to commit my life to Jesus." While he is praying out of the bedroom door comes a woman who they had

picked up at a bar and it was the first time she had ever done that. She said, "God sent you here tonight. I'm going to go home and ask my dad to forgive me but first I want to commit my life to Jesus." This is the power of the Gospel.

So will you pray from this pulpit to ever lectern, throughout this entire church that we'll be Gospel driven? Would you pray that God would allow me to open my mouth and preach the Gospel? Then would you pray that as we disassemble for six days during the week that we will scatter with the Gospel to friends and family? I just have one more prayer request. Pray "God, when we bring the power of the Gospel, set sinners free and because of the Gospel may this church be a safe haven for sinners and a death trap for sin." Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together and the privilege we could spend in Your Word. Thank You for all that are here where I have the privilege to learn the very things that I am preaching from them. Father, there may be someone reading this today that have now heard a glorious message that Jesus Christ has come to give them life and there is Good News. Father, may they not take the counterfeits that bring death but may they come to Christ. You simply say "Jesus, I'm a sinner. I can't save myself. I turn from myself and my sin. I put my trust in Jesus alone." I have something to give to you that will help you start growing. We have people who will pray with you. Praise God for what He can do in your life. God, please make this pulpit Christ centered, Gospel driven, and Spirit filled. Please allow our people in life and in relationships to be Christ centered, Gospel driven and Spirit filled. I pray this in Jesus' Name, who reigns forever, Amen.

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