

Introduction:

As we start this message this morning I want to grab your attention. There are a number of way I could do that but I am bypass illustrations or stories or video clips and cut right to the chase by saying one sentence. And I think, that is if you are reasonable person who has any interest in what goes out from this pulpit, that this one sentence will be enough to reel you in for a bit. So I bait the hook and cast this out for you.

The message this morning covers the most important matter that has ever been presented from this pulpit.

Let me say it another way...

In 117 years of this church, nothing has ever been talked about from this pulpit that has eclipsed the weightiness of our topic today.

Whoa...back off the superlatives. Well...to use the juvenile phrase, "I would if I could but I can't so I won't." I can't because the text before us demands superlatives. The topic today is paramount. It is the most outstanding, predominant, preeminent matter in the history of the world.

Did that catch your attention? Can you back that up? I don't say this because, I say it, but because the text says it. So if it is true that this is the most important message that has ever gone out from this pulpit...let's pray...

Prayer:

We have been in a series that started back in July and that will conclude today. But we pray and hope and trust that God is going to use the messages that we have been exposed to, in order to sustain us as we move into to the future. Here we are September 4...on the cusp of another full year of ministry that will demand sacrifices from each of us who are involved. The ministry that we have been called to do will demand a sacrifice of our time. It will deplete our energy and we will be put in situations as we engage in the messy lives of people that will bleed our emotions. And we have to do all this while battling an onslaught of our own personal distinct struggles that are present in our particular lives.

Some of us seem okay when we are here but then we go back to live our lives in the real world and when we step out of these four walls we remove our Christian mask and live however we want. Or some of us go back to our houses where either mom or dad are not around or maybe when they are around they are harsh with each

other. Maybe the reason mom and dad are the way they are is because they are engulfed by the overwhelming financial situation they find themselves in and are drowning in a sea of anxiety. Or maybe some of us are aging and face failing health or dwindling finances and your independence is threatened or has been reasonably taken away. Or some of us are young adults attempting to establish a career or are striving to land a job in a field relating to your studies. You are doing this while juggling work and the demands of your growing family. Most of us are overtaken by the workload confronting us at our jobs or our personal health or our syllabi or whatever. And most assuredly all of us are battling our own failings and personal addictions or struggles. We carry the wounds and scars attained by our engagement in a life long war waged with sin. None of us have escaped the consequences of sin. We have all embodied Psalm 53 when it says,

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, doing abominable iniquity; there is none who does good. God looks down from heaven on the children of man to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all fallen away; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one. All of us here this morning are broken. Some of us feel lost. Some of us are numbed into passive living because of our experience with shame. Some have developed ulcers because of their stress brought on by their guilt. Since this is true of us...what kind of message do we need to hear this morning?

Not only do we all deal with our own personal brokenness but also, as Randy Hankins pointed out a few weeks ago, we conduct our lives in the midst of a *crooked and depraved generation*. We live in a culture that is becoming increasingly hostile to true followers of Christ. We are accused of hate speech when we speak biblical truth. We are perceived as narrow minded when we present the message of salvation. We are labeled as out of touch and homophobic and intolerant.

So we deal with our own personal brokenness and the brokenness of our culture, but also the brokenness of the creation itself. The very ground beneath our feet is shaking. Last week a 6.2 magnitude earthquake rocked Italy and killed 290 people and displaced over 2500. This past Monday a single bolt of lightning struck and killed 323 reindeer in a field in Norway. In the past few weeks there have been historic floods in Louisiana that have killed 13. There are California wildfires. There are typhoons in Tokyo. It is clear that this earth itself is aching for the sons of God to be revealed (Romans 8:19; 22) and for release from the garden curse in Genesis 3.

If that wasn't grim enough consider the suicide bombings from ISIS and Boko Haram. Last week a suicide attack claimed by ISIS at a military facility in the southern Yemen killed 54. There was an explosion in a crowded market in Davao City in the Philippines that killed 14 and injured 71. And this story blows my mind,

the militants with the Islamic State terror group in Mosul executed nine Iraqi youth by slicing them in half with chainsaws as punishment for joining an anti-ISIS faction. We live in a world with shootings and riots and protests and tornados and typhoons.

In summary we live in a breathtakingly broken place that is filled with broken people who conduct their lives within broken cultures. With such a bleak picture painted how are we going to do it? Some of you are thinking, “*What a downer. I came to church today to be happy. I wanted hope. I wanted to go to a picnic and enjoy my three day weekend and my bbq tomorrow.*” How are we going to make it in this cursed world, with its cursed cultures knowing we ourselves are broken? We will get to an answer here in a bit. And once again the answer to that question is the most outstanding, predominant, preeminent matter in the history of the world.

But first lets recap where we have been in this series.

This series has been based off a proposition found in Revelation 1-3. That proposition is this:

Jesus is the supremely credentialed Messiah, who speaks authoritatively to his troubled church by His Words and we are accountable to them.

In John’s vision of Jesus in Revelation 1 we identified 24 “credentials” of the ascended Messiah and we talked about each one of them. In John’s vision in the early 90’s Jesus is unmistakably spectacular...and He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. (Hebrews 13:8).

In Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus had specific messages for the seven churches in Asia Minor. Those seven churches are a metaphor for the universal *ἐκκλησία* of God and the messages from Jesus are based off of His position in the midst of those churches and off of His unique divine knowledge. Nine times in these letter Jesus thunders the words, “I KNOW.” And even now Jesus speaks authoritatively to His church, through the preaching of His Word. He commends what needs to be commended and he warns against what needs to be warned against.

The church in John’s vision is symbolized by a lamp stand. A lamp stand is a furnishing that elevates light. It has no light in it itself. The light rests on it. The lamp stand is a platform for a flame. The church is a platform, an instrument, a furnishing which, when hearing and obeying the message of Jesus can be used by Jesus to elevate the His light to a dark world. If the church does not hear or does not obey the message of Jesus it is not holding up the Light of Christ and therefore has no point of existence. And we discovered that lamp stands can be removed. Revelation 2:5 -

“Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place.”

Then, each of the seven letters ends with a haunting phrase. *He who has an ear, let them hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.*

After months of praying as pastors and elders and church leaders about what the authoritative, supremely credentialed Messiah might say to us in our day...we were led to talk about these things.

The Spirit led Pastor Mark to discuss the need for our church to be Spirit led. As the body of Christ we should live our lives dependent on the convicting work and daily guidance of the Holy Spirit...and He does that work through His Word.

And the Spirit led Tim Shoemaker to discuss the need for our church to be a church that is Word fed. *We do not live by bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God* (Matthew 4:4). The Word benefits us as we give it more time and space in our lives and in order to experience the power of the Word we must put it into practice. And when we do that the Word will not just be absorbed but it will be shared.

The Spirit led Randy Hankins to examine how we are to relate to one another as members of the Body of Christ. He warned against selfishness because selfishness destroys the attitude that fosters unity. We were instructed to stop thinking about our entitlements and ourselves only because it makes it impossible to be like-minded with others. The text told us to do *“nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit but in humility consider other better than ourselves.”* Be willing to suffering wrong and do everything without complaining or arguing so that we can shine like stars in the universe as we hold out the Word of Life. And speaking of the universe...

The Spirit led Pastor Paul to insist that we understand our place in it. Life is not about you and it is not just about now, but life is about God and His glory and our top priority is to reveal the manifest glory of God through our transformed lives. We need to recapture the wonder and the majesty and the glory of our God who according to Psalm 29:10-11, *“sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord is enthroned as King forever.”*

And that leads us to this morning where the Spirit has led me to talk about the most outstanding, predominate, preeminent matter in the history of the world. Today we will be talking about the Gospel.

Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! All rebels, insurgents, dissidents, and protesters against the King! Hear the royal decree! A great day of reckoning is coming, a day of justice and vengeance. But now hear this, all inhabitants of the King's realm! Amnesty is herewith published by the mercy of your Sovereign. A price has been paid. All debts may be forgiven. All rebellion absolved. All dishonor pardoned.

None is excluded from this offer. Lay down the weapons of rebellion, kneel in submission, receive the royal amnesty as a gift of imperial love, swear loyalty to your Sovereign, and rise a free and happy subject of your King.

-John Piper

The most important message that has ever gone out from this pulpit also re-colors the broken and bleak picture that was painted earlier in this message. Because Jesus came into Nazareth in Luke 4 and *"he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And Luke adds the editorial comment, "All spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth."*

The message of the Gospel provides comfort for those who are mourning. It provides healing to those grieving. It provides *beauty instead of ashes and a garment on praise instead of a spirit of despair*. And those that accept it's message *will be called the oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor* (Isaiah 61:3b). Today we talk about the Gospel.

What is the Gospel? What does the word Gospel mean? We can be around the church all our lives and still not define it. Or worse, we can be around the church all our lives and be able to define it but then not live by it.

Why is this the most important message we could ever talk about? Because it is a message of the entire bible and it is what the Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians in his letter to them. So let's turn our attention to 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and soak in the most magnificent message ever proclaimed.

This is what Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

Big Idea: To the church at 7601 West Foster you need to understand the message of the Gospel and cling to its life-altering declaration.

There are two parts to that big idea that need to be broken down. And in order to break it down I want to ask 3 questions. **1) “What is the message of the Gospel? 2) “How is the Gospel life-altering?” and 3) “How do we cling to it?”**

What is the Gospel?

The word Gospel means good news. It is the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον. It appears 3 times in our text. It appears once as a noun and twice as a verb. Look at the text starting in verse 1 and reading through verse 3. Paul is reminding them of the εὐαγγέλιον he εὐαγγελιζῶ. He is taking quill and parchment to remind them of the “good message” he “good messaged” to them. He is recalling to their memory what he proclaimed in Acts 18: 4-5, 8, 11 when he would enter into the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade the Jews and the Greeks that the Christ mentioned in the Holy Scriptures was in fact Jesus of Nazareth. He and his message were officially opposed and reviled against by the religious authorities yet he kept proclaiming for a year and 6 months to whomever would listen as he worked as a tentmaker because he knew that the news that he possessed could bring a smile to peoples faces. His news was “happy news” because it was the unfolding of the “*manifold wisdom of God*” (Ephesians 3:10).

Paul told the Romans that he was not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the “*power of God for salvation to everyone who believes to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*”

The Gospel is a God wrought power. It is a work of God that not just brings temporary relief from the distress of this life but it is powerful enough to bring us to “ultimate salvation.” “*For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Romans 8:29-30).*”

The Gospel is the power of God for salvation for everyone “*who believes.*” This is truly Good News because you don’t have to do anything to get it. Consider the parable of Jesus in Luke 18. The righteous Pharisee proudly addresses God, “*God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all I get.*” (In comparison to others, I am better and I do my ceremonial religious duties). Is that how we receive an administration of God’s favor? No! We simply believe it and ask and the gift is ours. We humble ourselves and in our humility beat our breast and throw ourselves at the mercy of an Almighty God and say, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*” Jesus says, this man went down justified. To use Pauline language...this man was declared “righteous.” How? Through something he had done? No...by no means!

*Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress; Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

Paul was 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. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith”* (Romans 1:16-17). This verse views the Gospel through a wide-angle lens. It shows us the comprehensive picture that we have been given the righteousness of Christ. In the Gospel, the happy news that brings a smile to our faces sounds like 2 Corinthians 5:19 and 21, *“God, in Christ was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against the them and for our sake he was made to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. God’s wrath was poured out on Jesus instead of us His enemies. When His blood was spilled instead of ours He became our Passover Lamb and we, like the children of Israel, could walk out of our bondage to sin just like they walked out of Egypt.*

To the church at 7601 West Foster...you cannot loose this message.

That is the wide-angle lens view of the Gospel, but now lets look at it from a telephoto lens. Lets get right up close and see its components. Let’s observe the individual pixels because that’s what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7.

Verse 3 starts, *“For I delivered to you as of first importance.”* There it is in the text. I am not crazy for amplifying the importance of this message. My audacious claim is valid. What I am saying is of first importance. There is nothing more important. Paul, what is so important? The most important message in history of the world is the Gospel message. Paul then begins to describe in detail what he delivered to them.

Christ died for our sins.

Let’s look at this phrase in detail. First of all we see the word “Christ.” This is the Greek equivalent to the Hebrew word “Messiah.” This word was used in the Old Testament to refer to kings or priest who were anointed with oil. There are dozens of prophecies in the Old Testament that spoke of a “Coming Messiah” who would appear on the world scene and become enthroned as Israel’s true King and Priest. Paul uses this term to recognize the kingship and priesthood of Jesus. This is the same word that Peter uses in Mark 8 when he is asked by Jesus, *“Who do you say that I am?” You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”* So we are talking about the highly anticipated Jewish man of David’s line who would one day be the King of the Jews. Jesus, is the Christ, the Anointed King of God that came to Israel.

What does the Anointed King do?

Christ **died** for our sins.

Why did this Messiah die? This is NOT what ethnic Israel was expecting of their long awaited Messiah. They were expecting a Warrior Like King to come and after His triumphal procession into Jerusalem, lay claim to his rightful throne and begin a military campaign against the Roman oppressors. But this King, Jesus, as Messiah, died a cruel death without even lifting a weapon of war. In fact His enthronement ceremony was being nailed to a cross and hoisted up while people mocked and shouted, "Hail King of the Jews." They even put a sign over Him indicating His failed Kingship. Why? Why did he die even though he was not guilty of causing an insurrection?

According to our text, Christ died for **our sins**.

The wages of sin is death. But Jesus never sinned...right? Right! But He died for our sins. Our sin had separated us from God because we are part of a broken family tree beginning with Adam. The desire that was conceived in Adam eventually gave birth (James 1:13-14) to the first sin of disobedience (Genesis 3:6). *And just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, death spread to all men because all sinned –... For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous* (Romans 5:12; 19).

Jesus Christ was the True and Better Adam. He went bottoms up on the cup of God's wrath and stated one word "τετελεσται" (John 19:30). It is finished. Genuine justice? Served! God took upon Himself the weight of sin that was reserved for us. Because, *"it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins"* (Hebrews 10:4). *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption* (Hebrews 9:11-12).

After listing off a wrap sheet of horrific sins, Paul wrote to the Colossians in 3:6, *"because of sin the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience."* And instead of us receiving God's just wrath, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us* (John 1:14) and *he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people* (Hebrews 2:17). Judgment came. Justice was served. Jesus died. Jews and Gentiles saved. **Christ Died for Our Sins.** Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Remember earlier when I said that what we are talking about this morning is the story of the entire Bible? Well look at this phrase that is repeated twice in our text,

Christ died for our sins, *“in accordance with the Scriptures.”* Paul does not quote any specific text, but rather he refers to the whole of Scripture. He is saying this is the story of the Bible. It is like when the resurrected Christ appeared to a few of his disciples on the road to Emmaus and *“beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself”* (Luke 24:27). Wow...what I would give to have been there in that moment. All of that to cover verse 3. Now let's shift our lens to verse 4.

He was **buried**.

What do you do with a dead corpse? You bury it. Matthew 27:66 - *So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.* This was to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah 53:9 - *And they made his grave with the wicked, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.* The burial of Christ legitimizes his death and provides a place from which his subsequent resurrection is authentic. In his burial Christ completely identified with sinners.

He was **raised on the third day**.

This is what distinguishes Jesus from all the other 1st century Jews that found themselves hanging on torturous crosses for crimes they had committed. Crucifixion was a common practice in the culture. The fact that Christ died means nothing without His resurrection. Jesus was the only one that rose from the grave. Paul says later on this chapter, *“if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain...and we are still in our sins* (1 Corinthians 15:14; 17). One Dallas Theology Seminary professor has famously stated, *“The resurrection is God's “Amen” to Christ's “It is finished.”* – S. Lewis Johnson. Romans 4:25 states, *“he was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”*

Christ died for our sins and he was buried and he was raised and then he **appeared**

The text indicates that he appeared to many of his followers who could validate Paul's claims. I love the apostle Paul editorial comment in verse 6, *“many of whom are still alive.”* It's like he is saying if you don't believe me go ask around. They will substantiate my claims.

7601 West Foster this is the Gospel message.

Now let's ask our second question.

How is the Gospel message life-altering?

Let's look at the text to answer that question from the life of Paul.

1 Corinthians 15:7-10

When the message of the Gospel came to Paul on the Damascus road and he was blinded by the sight of the Risen Lord and later on Ananias prayed for Paul the text says, *“immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized”* (Acts 9:18). Consider what Paul was doing just 17 verses earlier, *“breathing threat and murder against the disciples of the Lord...asking permission from the high priest that if he found any belonging to The Way, men or women, that he might bind them and bring them to Jerusalem to stand trial.”* Then the Gospel comes to him and he sees the world from a new perspective...the scales fell off. The Christ whom he was persecuting was no longer Nazarene trash to be eliminated from the religious scene of 1st century Israel, but rather he was the supreme treasure of his heart and someone for whom he would be willing to *“count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord.”* Paul said, *“I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ* (Philippians 3:8). The scales fell off and then he rose and instead of persecuting Ananias he takes his first step of obedience to Christ and is baptized by the man he was intending to persecute.

In remembering that experience Paul says, *“I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain.”* That is what the Gospel is... it is an administration and extension of the effective grace of God to make us sinners into saints. *It is by grace we have been saved through faith and this not of ourselves* (Ephesians 2:8). When the message of the Gospel hits you and it is received and believed it produces change because it actually makes you a new creation. The old has gone and behold the new has come (2 Corinthians 5:17). We actually exhibit the miracle described to Nicodemous in John 3. We are born again. We are fundamentally different. And we manifest the promise of Ezekiel 11:19, *“I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.”* Amen

When that Good News comes to us we receive it. Believe it. Embrace it with a life of repentance we can begin to define ourselves by it like Paul did. He no longer defined himself by what he had done, but by what the grace of God has done to him. That's why he says, by the grace of God, *“I am what I am.”* Yes I persecuted the church. Yes I am unworthy to be called an apostle. Yes I am the least of the apostles. But because of God's grace I am what I am. And Paul sees himself that way because he knows that he is redeemed by a Great Redeemer whose grace is sufficient for him (2 Corinthians 12:9). Grace had led him safe thus far and grace will lead him home.

God has ordained all the events of your life according to His grace and mercy and has brought you to this place today...to this very hour...to hear these very

words...the hearing the marvelous message of the entire Bible...the Gospel preached. *Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts* (Hebrews 4:15). This message is life altering. Embrace it. Define yourself by it. Cherish it because within its message is a thrill of hope and the weary world can rejoice because a new and glorious morn as broken. Oh 7601 West Foster, fall on your knees.

So we have answered the questions:

1) What is the Gospel?

2) How is the Gospel life-altering?

And our final question is...

How do we cling to it?

To answer that question we will only look at the first two verses of our passage. How do I cling the life-altering message of the Gospel? Let's look once again at the text. First we see in verse 1 that we need to be "reminded" of the Gospel that was "preached" to us. And once we have "received" it we "stand" in its directives. So right away Paul reveals 4 steps in the process of clinging to the Gospel.

First, the Gospel must be communicated to us in the first place. Paul "**preached**" the Gospel to them. Romans 10:17 - *How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*

There is a popular phrase that is quoted by people that sounds good but is horrifically inaccurate. "Preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary use words." It sounds good and I understand in theory what people are saying when they quote it but I would urge people who say that to relinquish their desire to sound cool or to make Christianity all about social causes. Instead I wish they just quoted Scriptures like 1 Peter 2:12 - *Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.* - and let the Good News be verbally proclaimed with words.

General revelation, although day after day it testifies to an intelligent designer is not sufficient for unbelievers to be saved. They need to hear the message of the Gospel. That is why Paul after observing the altar to the unknown God in Athens stands up and begins to verbally proclaim the message of the Gospel to them. He tells them *God is the Creator and the giver of breath to all living beings and that He command men to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.* Now who does that sound like? (Acts 17:22ff). He is talking about Jesus. The very definition of the word "preach" is "to announce." We have to use words to preach the Gospel.

Second, Paul “**reminded**” them of the message of the Gospel. Paul was compelled to “remind” them of something he said over and over to them for 18 months! Why? He did it because he knows the human condition. We need to recall the message of the Gospel to mind every day. I know I do. I need reminders of God’s grace administered to me on an hourly basis and in some cases moment by moment because: I often wrestle with a guilty conscience. I often feel like my sins are condemning me. I often feel like I fall short. I often feel like I am lost. I am prone to wander and sometimes I actually feel myself begin drawn away. I have listened to the siren song. I have become very familiar with its melody and in those moments I need to be reminded of the grace that has been lavished on me (Ephesians 1:8). In those moments I need to know that I am a beloved Child of my Father (1 John 3:1). I need to know that He dwells within me (1 Corinthians 6:19) and I am His temple. I need to know that He will never leave or forsake me (Hebrews 13:5) and that even if I suffer I have no reason to be 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 (2 Timothy 1:12).

I hope it is indisputably clear why we need to hide the nourishing Word of God in our hearts (1 Peter 2:2-3). In moments of doubt and temptation it is sweeter than honey from the comb (Psalm 19:10). It is the sword of the Spirit that we must wield in order to survive this war against ourselves, our world and our adversary (Ephesians 6:17). The prophet Jeremiah say the Word of God is a fire that consumes and a hammer that can shatters (Jeremiah 23:29). It is a mirror that gives us self-knowledge (James 1:23) and it shines light to our paths (Psalm 119:105). Oh we need to plead with our Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father has sent in the name of His Son so that He can bring to remembrance all that our Most Blessed Savior said (John 14:26). We need to be reminded of the Gospel.

The third concept we see in verse 1 is that we have “**received**” the message of the Gospel. It is a compound Greek word. Παρα – meaning “to come alongside” and λαμβανω- “to receive.” When you combine them together it gives the idea of “to take to oneself” or “to take into fellowship.” This isn’t just intellection asset to the propositional truth of the Gospel...it becomes the essential core of who we are. Existentially speaking the message has become us and we have become the message.

And finally the fourth thing we see in verse one is that we are “**standing**” in the message that has been preached to us. In other words this is where we are located. The message of the Gospel has reached our ears and we have turned around to follow Jesus. This is something that has happened in the past but it is also our present reality. We are, in this moment, standing in it. This is our post and we are not being foolish like the Galatian believers who, “*after beginning by means of the*

Spirit, tried to finish by means of the flesh” (Galatians 3:13). No we are planted firmly in the bedrock of the Good News.

That’s verse one. Now onto verse 2

So verse one: we have **heard** the true **Gospel**, we have **received** it and are currently **standing** it and we are **reminding** ourselves of it. Since that is the case, this Gospel message is the means by which God will do the active work of bringing you to **ultimate salvation**. This is a present passive verb. This is not something that has happened to us in the past, rather this is something that God is currently doing for us and will continue to do for us into the future. God is the active agent of salvation. And please don’t think of this as a one-time event. No, the word has the present and the future in mind. The word means to “keep from harm” or “to preserve” or “to rescue.” What is the current or future harm that is coming that we need to be preserved from or rescued from? Hebrews 9:17 – *It is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment.* We need to be rescued from God’s just judgment that we will face when we take our final breath. What Paul is saying here is that the Gospel message is something that is powerful enough to weather the storm of God’s just judgment and if we are to be saved from that just judgment the righteousness of Christ must truly be administered to us through His life, death and resurrection. This is God’s doing. God is able to save and He will continue to save us in the future...because Jesus *“is able to save to the uttermost those that come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).*

Be that as it may, there is a conditional clause in the second half of this verse that summons us to, *“hold fast to the word that has been preached to us – unless we have believed in vain.”*

Our responsibility is to **“hold fast”** to the teaching. The word Paul uses carries with it the idea of continued belief and has within it the implication of acting in accordance with such belief.

Imagine with me for a moment. The year is 2020 and we are in Tokyo Japan and they have introduced a new event into the Summer Olympics and that event is called the tug-of-war. You qualify for the finals and you toe the line with your opponent and the tug of war referee blows a whistle, or shoots a gun or maybe just yells, “Go” and you exert an enormous amount of energy and the rope and your opponent surge in your direction. A smile comes across your face and you feel like you are reassured of your training and skill and strength and you strain again and you take a step backward. And it is really hard and your hands have an initial tinge of pain but you press on and pull and gain another step back. Then your knees shake and your back begins to throb and your hands are becoming numb and sweaty, but you still

pull and strain and take another step backwards and you are just a few more steps from the finish line and you begin to think. "This is harder than I thought. Maybe I didn't take into consideration how difficult this might be. I didn't realize how much I would suffer if I entered into this Olympic competition. In fact some people ridicule me when I tell them I am an Olympic tug of war competitor. Maybe I didn't count the cost. Maybe this isn't for me. Maybe I am close enough to the finish line. If I just let go of this rope this pressure and ridicule and sacrifice will all be over. So you loosen your grip. And the rope begins to slip. And you feel temporarily relief and turn to walk out of the arena and make your way to the locker room and push open the door and through the shouts of praise and indistinct jeering of the crowds and you hear the words, "*Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:31). Why? Because you didn't hold fast and you believed in vain.

If you don't hold fast...if you don't persevere...if you don't endure, or hold on to, or keep going, or persist in the teachings of the Gospel, then Paul says you have believed in vain. And vain belief will not cut it at the judgment. Paul says to the Philippians "*work out your salvation with fear and trembling*" (Philippians 2:12).

The author of Hebrews says, "*For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.*"

It is chilling to think that there are people in this room today who have that as their future reality. There is no proof or fruit in their lives that comes from abiding in the vine (John 15). They have an appearance of godliness, but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5). They prove that they don't love Jesus because they don't keep His commandments (John 14:15). They don't mortify their sin (Romans 8:13). They don't walk in the good works that has been prepared for them (Ephesians 2:10). They don't present the members of their bodies as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13). They don't offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1-2). They don't rely on the grace of God that has appeared and that trains them to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions. They don't live self-controlled, upright, godly lives and they are not waiting for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works (Titus 2:11-14). So those people can anticipate a fearful expectation of judgment upon their death.

All of us here this morning need to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). *Fight the good fight. Finish the race. Keep the faith.* (2 Timothy 4:7) and *preserve your souls* (Hebrews 10:39).

Conclusion

He who has an ear let Him hear what the Spirit says to the church at 7601 West Foster. You need to understand the message of the Gospel and cling to its life-altering declaration. You must become dispensaries of my grace. Your gathering must be a safe place where tax collectors and sinners and prodigals, and bitter sons can gather at my supremely credentialed feet so that I, through you as my body, can pour out my grace on the undeserving. So that I, through you as my body, can lavish sinners with my love. So that I, through you, can heal the sick and bind up the broken. So that I, through you can touch the untouchable and love the unlovable and forgive the unforgivable and welcome the undesirable and save the otherwise unsavable (Art Azurdia – Blessed Are the Merciful) so that all might see and hear that *I am the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty* (Exodus 34:6). I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick (Luke 5:31-32). So tell them! Tell them. Tell them *trustworthy saying that is deserving of full acceptance...Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners* (1 Timothy 1:15). Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled (Luke 14:23). Proclaim it! Shout it from the rooftops. Herald that message to all with ears to hear, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). To the church as 7601 West Foster I say to you, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*” (Matthew 28:19-20). *As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you* (John 20:21).

Benediction:

To all who are weary and need rest; to all who mourn and long for comfort;
to all who feel worthless and wonder if God even cares;
to all who are weak and fail and desire strength;
to all who sin and need a Savior —
this church opens wide her doors with a welcome from Jesus,
the mighty friend of sinners, the ally of his enemies,
the defender of the indefensible,
the justifier of those who have no excuses left...
...come stumble towards Him.

- adapted from James M Boice of Tenth Presbyterian Church

We have heard the joyful sound: Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Spread the tidings all around. Jesus saves! Jesus saves!
Bear the news to every land,
Climb the steeps and cross the waves;
Onward!—'tis our Lord's command; Jesus saves! Jesus saves!

-We Have Heard the Joyful Sound

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land.

- Proverbs 26:25