

Sermons 2008

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Chapter 1. Is There Any Hope For America?

READ - *1 Thessalonians 2:1-13*

TEXT - *But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)*

THEME -

1.1. Introduction

ILLUS - 18 teenage girls in Massachusetts have banded together in a "pregnancy pact." They agreed to all get pregnant and then work together to raise the babies. When I hear of how off course our moral compass has become in America, I cannot help but wonder if there's any hope for our country? And if that's not bad enough, consider that the suggested solution to this by the talking heads is to give them more contraceptives! (Am I the only one who sees how idiotic that response is?)

Is there any hope for America? Can you and I make any kind of difference in this world?

It's easy to be pessimistic as we read the news, which is increasingly depressing. However, for the believer, there is always hope, and always hope that can make a difference.

- I can't physically do very much for the poor of our country or our world...

Note: I CAN do SOMETHING, and that's why your mission giving goes to such causes as the Randolph Suffield Food Shelf and the Haven of Rest Rescue Mission. It's also why a few of you help feed the hungry at the rescue mission once a month.

- I can't help those who die around me of various illnesses...

ILLUS - I've performed 4 funerals in the past year...

- I can't stop the violence and crime that saturates our cities...

ILLUS - There was a man in California this past week who stomped and beat his 2 year old son to death along a highway while onlookers looked on. Only the bullet from a policeman's gun finally stopped the violence.

- I can't help the insanity that fills the minds of our leaders, and says it's O.K. to burn our flag, but not to display our Bible... it's O.K. to kill our babies, but not our wildlife... the way to stop a teenage girl who is TRYING TO GET PREGNANT from doing so is to give her free contraceptives...
- ... or can I?

God has given me the greatest news that has ever been proclaimed to mankind in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

That includes the seemingly hopeless poor, the seemingly helpless sick, the seemingly unreachable criminal mind, and the seemingly insane philosophers of our day.

The hope of America is not her politicians or political parties, not the constitution, not the courts, not secular education (which is held up as a panacea for all of society's ills)...

The hope of America (and all the world) is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul, in our scripture today, gives us an example of a life dedicated to proclaiming the gospel. The passage is arranged as a defense of Paul's ministry (for he was always under attack by those who would discredit him). In his defense, he spoke of his message, his motives, and his methods.

We will follow that line of thinking in our study.

1.2. Our Message

1. OUR MESSAGE IS NOT
 - ... political activism
 - ... environmentalism
 - ... socialism
 - ... education

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. And Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:59-60)

In other words, as Christians some things are simply not our concern - not our message.

ILLUS - "Preacher" I know who preaches about "sustainable energy", "buying heifers for the heifer project", windmills and other environmental issues, but in the 2 years I've known of this man, I have

never heard him mention the name Jesus Christ one time!

2. OUR MESSAGE IS:

The gospel of God. (vss. 2,4,8,9)

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you... By which also ye are saved... For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen.... (1 Corinthians 15:1-5)

QUOTE - "I brought you what I received - something very important - that Christ died for our sins as the Bible said He would. He was buried, and He rose on the third day, as the Bible said He would." (1 Cor. 15:3-4 - BECK)

That's the gospel! The good news! And THAT is our message!

3. Some things to remember about the message.

- a. It takes courage to proclaim it. (vs. 2)

Christianity is not for wimps.

QUOTE - "Of the memorials in Westminster Abbey there is not one that gives a nobler thought than that inscribed on the monument to Lord Lawrence - simply his name with the date of his death, and these words: 'He feared man so little because he feared God so much.'"

Do you really want to make a difference in your world? Help people? It will not be easy. It will take courage.

ILLUS - In the Readers' Digest each month there are stories of heroism. We are constantly reminded of how in the face of grave danger, somebody must step up. Somebody must have the courage to step near the burning car and pull the person to safety. Somebody has to be willing to jump into the raging river and grab the drowning child. It takes courage to put yourself at risk and do what is necessary to help somebody else.

And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. (Jude 1:22-23)

- b. It is a stewardship. (vs. 4)

...I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; (Colossians 1:25)

c. It takes work. (vs. 9)

How do you become good at any discipline? It takes work. We recognize this without question in earthly endeavors. Tiger Woods herculean effort in the US Open this month has to inspire even the most jaded observer. Great things happen when people work hard to become great at them.

Same is true in sharing the gospel. I'm no good at it, preacher! I just can't do that. Nobody starts out good at it! It takes effort... work... preparation.

That's why we LEARN the Bible... READ the Bible... listen to others PREACH the Bible and TEACH the Bible... so that we internalize it and can then share it with others!

It's also why we GO. It's why we SET ASIDE TIME every Lord's Day to worship God and learn of Him. It's not optional... it's a required part of our preparation for sharing it with others. It's why we SET ASIDE TIME for going door to door once per month here. ALL OF US, myself included, could find something recreational to do on Saturday mornings. But that doesn't help anybody, does it. If we're going to help our world, it's going to take work. (BTW - The first time we did door-to-door visitation, 2 people showed up. The last two times, nobody but Beth and I have showed up. Does Randolph Christian Church really want to help... really want to win people to Christ?)

1.3. Our Motives

ILLUS. "Bobby Dodd, Georgia Tech's athletic director, tells of the coach who, with his team leading 7 to 6 in the last minute of play, carefully instructed his quarterback not to pass under any condition. But when the ball was carried within the opponent's ten yard line, the quarterback was overcome by temptation. He passed, and the ball was intercepted by the rival's fleetest back, who broke into an open field and raced toward pay dirt. He was speeding past midfield when suddenly, out of nowhere, the quarterback who had passed overtook him and brought him down. After the game, the losing coach remarked to his barely victorious counterpart, 'I'll never understand how your boy overtook my fastest back.' 'Well, I'll tell you,' came the reply. 'Your back was running for touchdown - my boy was running for his life.'" (Wall Street Journal)

QUOTE Thomas A. Kempis, "Man sees your actions, but God sees your motives."

QUOTE Dr. Paul Vanaman, "Men, examine your motives."

1. Our motive should not be pleasing men (vs. 4)
2. Our motive should not be pleasing self (vss. 5-6)
3. Our motive should always and only be pleasing God! (vs. 4)

1.4. Our Methods

HOW do we do it, though? Note some things we learn from Paul's methods... perhaps they will help us:

1. Accuracy and Simplicity (vss. 3,6)

Why do you suppose I harp so much on the Bible and your personally reading/studying/learning/carrying it? Because you need to know it yourself before you can be accurate in presenting its truth to somebody else!

And you can learn enough to be accurate by just concentrating on the simple gospel. Learn a couple key verses - Romans Road... ABCs of Salvation (in our bulletin every Sunday and on the church website)... memorize *1 Corinthians 15:1-5*

2. Honesty (transparency) and Holy Example (vss. 5,10)

ILLUS - I led a man to the Lord when I was attending KSU. He knew me well, and when we got in the guts of the presentation he threw some things he knew about me in my face. "What about that?!??" My only defense was honesty and transparency. "A Christian is not perfect. I am far from perfect as a believer, but the blood of Jesus Christ took care of all that. Every day I try to be more like Christ, and everyday I fall on my face a little bit, but I'm trying to live for Him. Christians aren't perfect, but they are forgiven!"

The KEY is that the person needs to be able to see that you ARE trying to serve God. There has to be some EVIDENCE that lends credibility to your words.

3. Compassion and Encouragement (vss. 7-8,11)

QUOTE - "Compassion is your pain in my heart."

People are HURTING! They desperately need that which you have!

ILLUS - Lepers outside Samaria - *Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day [is] a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: (2 Kings 7:9)*

1.5. Conclusion

We asked the question in the introduction, "Can I make a difference in the world today?"

The answer is NO, if I try the worlds methods.

But the answer is YES, if I faithfully do that which God wants me to do: proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

May God help us to integrate the sharing of our faith, and the winning of souls, into our daily lives, so that we, like Paul, can make a difference to our world.