

Communion Weekend

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 November 2017

Preacher: Iver Martin

[0 : 00] Turn with me to another part of the New Testament, this time 1 Timothy 1. And this is one of those statements that encapsulates the gospel in a one-liner.

1 Timothy 1 and verse 15 where Paul says this, here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Just these words, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

That's what we've been about today. That's in fact, that's what we're about every time we come to worship on a Lord's Day or whenever God's people gather in the church.

We're about the sentence that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. It seems so simple, doesn't it?

[1 : 13] It seems so basic. Many of you have read this chapter, this verse. You know it. You've known it from when you were small, at least I have, and many others have as well.

And we've heard the message before. But sometimes when you hear something over and over again, its impact diminishes. It's like when you're on a plane and you regularly fly, as some of you do.

And there's this annoying safety announcement at the very beginning. And it always wakes you up when you're hoping to get to sleep. And they have to go through this. And sometimes they say, I know, because they can see everybody's nobody's paying attention.

I know you've heard this before, but please give us your attention because it could save your life.

Well, that's what the gospel is all about. And if you have heard it before, then all the more reason for us to listen to it again.

Not just because sometimes our interest diminishes, but because you lose. If you are a Christian tonight, if you follow Jesus, sometimes we can lose. I know that in my own Christian life, I've been tempted to lose sight of the wonder and the marvel of what Jesus did because I'm so familiar with it.

[2 : 34] Because I've read my Bible so often. We're tempted to lose sight of the marvel of what Jesus did and lose sight of what God has made us in Him. And so tonight we're going to return to this very basic statement that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We were remembering His death this morning in communion. We were doing that by eating and drinking the elements that represent the broken body and the shed blood of Jesus. And that's a very precious moment. As often as you do this, Jesus said, you show forth the Lord's death until He comes. And so it's a really precious and a special moment in the life of the church to remember how He died for us. And yet we know that we live in an unbelieving world. And it seems that no matter how marvelous Jesus is to us who know Him, it's amazing how there are so few of us.

And it seems that God isn't really doing much, at least in our society. Thankfully, there are places in the world where God is impacting many more people than He is in this part of the world.

And so I thought tonight that I would try and reflect on some of the obstacles that there are that seem to prevent people from coming to discover this Jesus for themselves, just in case that there might be perhaps one or two of us here tonight who haven't taken that step of faith to believe and to follow Jesus Christ. What might the obstacles be? Because if we identify what these obstacles are, perhaps perhaps I can encourage you to look again at these obstacles and see if you can see past them and to understand what you're missing if you're not a Christian, if you're not following Jesus. What might these obstacles be? Well, I've had 20 years in ministry and I've often spoken to people in pulpits and in private about the gospel. So, I think I have some experience of what this is, but you have as well.

And many more years in the Christian life trying to wrestle with some of the obstacles that people, that there are in front of people. The first one is this, that for some people, the gospel is simply not on their radar. God is not on their radar. He might be on their bucket list, something to do later on, something to make sure you sort out later on, but not on their radar at the moment. And that is because there's so many other things filling up our time and our attention that God seems to have been pushed out there. A number of years ago now, my wife and I went out on a walk in a remote, beautiful place up in the north of Scotland. We went out on the Saturday afternoon. It was a gorgeous day.

And we were just, we had lunch with us and we were just walking, enjoying the countryside and it was, wasn't too difficult. And in the middle of admiring the scenery around us, Mary said to me, she said, see up in the sky, the sky was just, there was no clouds. She said, see these two dots up in the sky?

[6:19] And so I looked and sure enough, there was these two dots. She said, I think they're eagles. I looked and we had binoculars with us. And sure enough, we looked at the binoculars, sure enough, you could just make them out through the binoculars that they were, they had to be eagles because they were, they were really quite sizable. From that moment, everything changed. We just sat there and were fighting over the binoculars, over who was going to see the eagles. And even if, even they didn't really come very much closer to us, but because they were eagles, all of a sudden, everything else took second place, the scenery, the place, the location, the weather, the lunch, everything took second place. All we wanted to do was to focus on these eagles because they're such a rare sight.

And that's the way God is in the minds of people. He's not on their radar until something happens to place their focus on him. And I wonder tonight, where is God on your radar?

Is he something, is this something that you give any thought to? Or is it a passing thought? Or is it maybe something you give that you think about last thing at night and you think, well, I really must get to this at some point? Or, or where is it in the list of priorities? I would say, I would urge you this evening to make God your number one priority. Why? Because he is the reason why we are here. He's the reason why we exist. If you want to really discover the meaning of life, why we're here, it's got to lie with God.

And so, I would say at the very first instant tonight, to make God your number one priority. To discover him. To discover him. To think about him. To prioritize your relationship with him.

So, that's the first thing then, that for some people, God is not on their radar. Because for me, when I think about the question, why am I a Christian tonight? And I do think about that question. I know I was brought up in a Christian home, as many of you were. That's not the reason why I'm a Christian. I've often wrestled with the question, why am I a Christian? What makes you think? What makes you believe in the Christian faith? I go back as the starting point to the chapter we read in John chapter 20, to the resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is always my starting point.

[9:10] And if you are in conversation with somebody who wants to know about the Christian faith, I would suggest to you that you'll start at that point, at the place where Jesus rose from the dead. Because you know what this means? That if Jesus rose from the dead, it means that he has the key to life and death.

Now, to me, that is explosive. It is the most earth-shattering truth that I think I could ever come across. Because here is this man, and he's done the impossible. The one thing that we're all agreed on tonight is that death is irreversible. It's the great separation. You can't even in this day and age where so much is known and has been discovered. Nobody can do anything about death to reverse it. But here, if this chapter is true, here is a man who is able to reverse it. What's more, if you go back into his life, you discover that on at least three occasions, he has done it to other people.

Lazarus, John chapter 11, when he arrived at the tomb of Lazarus and where he went to the tomb and he told them to roll the stone away. Lazarus had already been dead four days.

And he called out, Lazarus, come out. And Lazarus was raised from the dead. He came out, covered with the grave clothes. He was alive again. Do you know what this means? It means that here is this individual, Jesus of Nazareth, who is able, who has the capacity to be able to reverse the process of death. Do you know how earth-shattering that is?

And if you're asking, well, what's that got to do with me? Even if that's true at the time, what's it got to do? Well, I'll tell you what it's got to do with you. Because in that very same chapter, Jesus makes an extraordinary promise. He says this, I am the resurrection and the life.

He who believes in me, though he were dead, yet he will live. And he who lives and believes in me, shall never die. Do you understand what that means? It means that Jesus has the key to unlock the door of death. He is able to reverse the process of death. He's able to do the impossible.

[11:53] And he's able to do that because he is God. Now, to me, there is nothing more important than that. Because I know I'm going to die. I know that whatever I've done or achieved in this life, I know I'm going to die. I've seen it in the lives of others that I've known in this world. And so have you.

And so have you. To our sorrow and our bereavement. We've watched people die. We've seen their coffin being laid in the grave. We know how utterly impossible it is to reverse that process. Now, here is a man who is able to reverse it. Not only that, he's able to, he gives a promise. I am the resurrection and the life. That's why I believe in Jesus Christ. Because not only he promised that, he actually proved it in himself by rising from the dead. So that's what makes the Christian faith so utterly unique. People ask, well, what's different about your faith and any other faith? This is what's different. Here is Jesus of Nazareth, who has really died on a Roman cross, who has been buried. And three days later, he comes to life again. And his resurrection is witnessed by hundreds of people. So those things don't know about justice, got it in Chicago. It's about Jederson of baptized but he didn't know brotherhood, it's not over GM. And while he says this, yes, çok harves berikan.

I love how much life... I like yourself to say doesn't it. My fiance did not agree. It was up to you. A year ago, he remained there personally. He debate about his head and he launched in the Bible. Well, language is always a problem. Those of you who are students know that if you do biology, you have to start learning the various words that are used to describe the biological concepts you're going to have to become experts in, or engineering, or literature, or language, or whatever. And it's true that the Bible has a language of its own, a language that describes how God created the world, and how the world became a fallen place, a separated place from God, and how God sent His Son to reconcile the world. But I don't think language is a problem. I don't think if you really want to know something, you will get over the language problem. A number of years ago, I came across this thing on the internet. And I was absolutely baffled by this headline that came across, just appeared. I think it was AOL or something like that. And it said this. It said, Hathaway woos in McQueen at one day premiere. Yeah, I was like that as well. Hathaway woos and McQueen at one day premiere. I was thinking, what in the world is this headline all about? I had no clue what I was looking at. So I guess that's the whole point of a headline.

It's to get your attention. And it's to get you reading the next bit. And I'm afraid that the more I read it in the next bit, I'm the less interested I became. But the whole point was that this was, the movie was one day, it was being premiered, I guess, in London or whatever. The actress was Anne Hathaway and she was in a McQueen dress. Well, big deal. But that was the headline. And that was the language I had to learn, which was complete. It was like reading something in Chinese, as far as I was concerned, until I understood what was going on. And very often, that's the case when people read the Bible. Don't stop. Don't let the language put you off. Because God is too important to be put off by language. Don't be put off. Because actually, when it comes down to it, the message of the Bible is remarkably simple. It's remarkably straightforward.

[16:14] Some people just don't get it either. Some people don't quite grasp the gospel. They don't get it. And they respond to the gospel in the way that you think that they should respond, or rather that they think they should respond. I've been 20 years in ministry and very often in ministry, when you preach a sermon, or you take a service, wherever you are, you usually go to the door afterwards. And sometimes the comments at the door can be very revealing. And it always amazes me how many people say, well, that was nice.

Well, that was nice. You didn't do this. You were very honest. But it amazes me how many people, they just tell you what they think you want them to say. They're so polite about it, right?

And you could have been preaching on hell. You could have been preaching on judgment. You could have been preaching on sin. And you could have been preaching on the most horrendous things, because there are horrendous facts in the Bible. And you go to the door and say, well, that was nice.

I mean, like the passage that we read in Ephesians chapter 2, where we're described as we're dead in trespasses and sins. That is not nice. That is a horrendous description. And sometimes I've often thought that if somebody said, if somebody came up to me afterwards, I was preaching on that and

punched me in the face and said, how dare you describe me as being dead in trespasses and sins? I might say, yep, you've got it. Because we think we know the reaction to the message of the gospel, but more often than not, we don't. We don't. Because the gospel begins with us who we really are. It's like a mirror in which we see ourselves on the inside as God sees us. And that's what's so unpalatable about the Bible.

And that's what drives people away more often than not. I think that that's what drives people away. As soon as they come face to face with what they really are and all their shame, as we have had to do, that they find that too much to take. And other people don't see the problem as relating to them. [18:51] You hear people saying, you hear people saying, well, I can think of somebody I would love to have been there tonight to hear about Jesus. Somebody who I know who really needs to hear the message in order for them to be transformed. They need that transformation. But in actual fact, the person himself doesn't think he needs it. Doesn't think he needs any. There's no need for him to be right with God. It was rather like the Pharisees in Jesus' day. There were two classes of people in Jesus' day. There were the religious leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees.

And they didn't think they needed God's forgiveness at all because they thought they could work their way into God's favor. They thought they were good enough. So, when Jesus came, they ignored him.

In fact, they were the ones who turned out to hate him and to arrange for his crucifixion. But there was another class of people like the prostitutes and the sinners, the ones that everyone kept on the margins of society. Luke chapter 15, the publicans and the sinners.

And they were the ones who recognized how much they needed God's forgiveness. And how marvelous it was that this man, Jesus, was saying something to them that nobody else ever said because the religious leaders had no time for them. There was no place in their kingdom for the outcasts.

But the door was open in God's, in Jesus' kingdom. He welcomed them. He loved them and wanted them to be transformed no matter what shame there was in their hearts, no matter what they were guilty of, and no matter how hopeless their lives were. I came, he said, not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. And it's still the same today. God saves sinners. Christ Jesus came into the world to save, to save sinners. You know, I read books sometimes that tell me that, you know, today's world, today's world, you know, there's not very much of a concept of guilt in today's world. And some sections of the church, they try to suggest that, you know, we really need to have a different approach.

[21:28] We need to have a more subtle approach. We need to really talk to people about different things, rather than sin and salvation. These are old concepts. We need to think about a much more subtle approach. Because in the world, there's not much awareness of guilt. I've never heard such nonsense in all my life. There is an awareness of guilt in today's world. And there always will be, as long as humanity remains human.

We were created by God to know Him and enjoy Him and to love Him and to be right with Him. And as long as there is that separation from God, there will be that restlessness and that awareness of our wrongdoing in which we know that there is something desperately wrong.

I remember watching BBC News one time again, many years ago, and Simon McCoy, Simon McCoy always gets the flack, doesn't he? I think he's great. I think that you can Google him and say, the 10 gaffes by Simon McCoy. You can do that later on. He's the one who fell asleep, for example, on live TV at one time. And he's the one that said something about the royal birth or whatever. And of course, he became famous for all of that. I think he's tremendously human. And the gaffes prove that he is human. Well, one of the things that I've never been picked up is something I heard him saying.

They were doing this bit on BBC News about an app that the Roman Catholic Church brought out, I think it was about seven or eight years ago, in which you could confess your sins to the app. And I'm not kidding. They were actually reporting this on BBC News, and this was for confession, so that you could switch this app on and then you could confess your sins. Do you know what Simon McCoy said?

[23:33] He said, my phone doesn't have enough memory. Please don't tell me there's no guilt in the world. There's no feeling of guilt. There is. There is. It's just that people like to pretend otherwise. They like to pretend that everything's okay. They like to think, well, make the most of the life that we have.

Don't let us think about the negatives. But what if the negatives are real? What if we are a condemned race? What if right now that we are under the anger of God? And what if God sent his son into the world to change all of that and to reconcile us to God by dying on the cross to pay the price for our guilt, to bring us back to God and to transform us? That's the best message that humanity could ever, ever learn. And that's exactly what Jesus came to do. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. But here's a last obstacle. And with this, I close. Here's a last obstacle. What happens? What have you written yourself off tonight? I reckon there are loads of people in the world who think there is no hope for them. Maybe because of some past happening, something that they have done in the past that has meant that they are hopeless and unsavable, that God could not possibly have any time for them. Maybe it's a particular wrongdoing, something that they know they've done wrong, something that maybe nobody even knows about apart from themselves. Something that's brought shame and darkness into their life and has meant that they could not possibly conceive that God would have any time for them. Perhaps it's a recurring temptation. Perhaps it's an addiction that has left them with a sense of despair. I reckon that there are millions of people who are in despair tonight, but who need to know and who need to hear that there is a God who can transform their despair into the promise of everlasting life through Jesus Christ. And that's the work of the church. That's our work tonight to go and to mingle with people, to be the salt of the earth, to be the light of the world, so that men and women can see that there is a different way of living. And that God can take away our despair and God can take away our guilt by coming into our lives and changing us. And He'll do that in the gospel. He'll do it for you if you don't know the gospel tonight. He'll do it for you if you come and ask Him. This is what Jesus said. He said, ask and you will receive. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. And others need to hear that message as never before. Don't be put off by hostility or indifference. That's very often a mask for insecurity. The kind of insecurity which is rife in today's world because people do not know this gospel that we love and that we rejoice in and that we want to live by. So let's be confident in the gospel as never before this evening. Let's ask God to strengthen us and to revive us and to make us strong in the Lord because we have a great Savior. A Savior who is the way and the truth and the life. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the guilt that would have resulted in our condemnation and in our eternal punishment.

[28 : 14] We thank you that you have come in, you have invaded our lives in the gospel and that Jesus has changed us. But we want, Lord, what we have to belong to other people. We want them to know Jesus as well.

So we pray for anyone who hasn't yet come to faith in Jesus this evening. We pray that this might be the occasion when they take that step of faith and asking that you will rescue them from their guilt and their sin. But we pray, Lord, also that we might go out with renewed strength to witness for Jesus by the way in which we live and the way we talk, by the providential conversations that we get into with the people that we've come to know. We pray that we will look for opportunities to to make Jesus known in this world for we ask in Jesus name. Amen.