

The Missional Power of Gospel Culture
John 13:34-35

Intro

God graciously saved me in my late 20s and as I began to attend church and get involved in the life of the church, it was not long before I heard a most familiar phrase repeated again and again when people talked about evangelism and mission

“preach the Gospel at all times and use words if necessary”

The idea that you should primarily “preach” the gospel to others by your life and example and if necessary, you should verbally share the gospel with others

Typically attributed to St. Francis of Assisi but highly dubious considering that St. Francis was a monk that was part of an order of preachers and in fact is called by one historian as “that fiery little preacher”

Gets at a debate that is common in the church - is evangelism and mission primarily about Word or deed?

What I have come to understand is that in these early days of church life I was catching my first glimpse into a false dichotomy that can confuse our view of Christian mission - Where there are some folks who want to preach the gospel and some folks who think it is more important to “proclaim” the gospel by their example. Primarily about proclamation or demonstration?

A false dichotomy because in order to be faithful in our evangelism and mission we need both Word and deed - we must never put asunder that which God has joined together when it comes to the mission of the church - FOR we need both the truth of the Gospel AND we need to live out the reality of the Gospel in lives of blessing toward others in order to faithfully fulfill the mission of Jesus Christ to save sinners and fill the earth with the glory of God

Ray Ortland Jr. - The Gospel - provides a helpful way of thinking about this:

Gospel doctrine - gospel culture = hypocrisy

Gospel culture - gospel doctrine = fragile

Gospel doctrine + gospel culture = power

I think I can safely assume that most of if not every person here - certainly every Christian here wants a church that functions in the power of God

Isn't the Holy Spirit the one who gives power to the church oh yes!

But it is as the Holy Spirit applies the Gospel - the good news of the risen Christ of the Cross - that creates and energizes a new kind of people in the earth - God is creating a culture of grace in and through the Gospel - his church - a Gospel culture

It is that Gospel Culture united with Gospel Doctrine that God is using in the World to accomplish his will to save sinners and build his kingdom.

My aim this morning - to hold up before you the beauty of Gospel Culture and how it informs Gospel mission and propels mission forward - then to lower the bar when it comes to how we enter into lives of faithfulness when it comes to mission - in all of this to raise your faith and expectation for what God will do as we seek to be faithful to him.

“The Missional Power of Gospel Culture”

Two questions:

- I. What Does Gospel Culture Look Like?
2. How Does Gospel Culture Empower Mission?

I. What Does Gospel Culture Look Like?

- A. Refresh your awareness of inform you for the first time the conviction that we have at LHC that Biblical Christianity is not merely NICE people doing NICE things so that people will know we are NICE and maybe they will like us - I’m talking about something much sturdier and more beautiful and abiding
- B. When one believes the Gospel - Jesus Christ born of a virgin, lived a perfect life of obedience, died as the substitute for sinners, bearing our sin and the wrath of God against us in our sin, rising from the grave 3 days later and now sits at the right hand of the Father freely accepting all who come to him, forgiving, justifying, giving rest and life to all who come - one believes one is saved and swept up into the eternal purposes of God - NON CHRISTIAN
 1. When one believes - one is born again - we become a new creation - new orientation toward all of life and incorporation into the people of God - his church. New desires, new impulses, new attitudes and actions toward others. God begins to transform us from the inside out.

Illustration: My co-worker at Hilti

- C. By his Spirit there is an internal transformation - further God has given us his Word to shape the contours of what life with others looks like as we follow Jesus. Faithfulness to God will be present wherever the Gospel is proclaimed and believed but NT Christianity - what I’m calling Gospel Culture isn’t automatic - if it was automatic, we wouldn’t need the Bible to instruct us!
ONE PAGE
- D. Not just in this church but in SGC historically and happily pursue NT Christianity along with other faithful churches around the globe - what I’m calling Gospel culture - I think it is vital to bring definition to what we are talking about - remember it’s not just being NICE
- E. Remind you or inform you for the first time of the 7 values of a healthy Gospel culture that we pursue within this church - not everything there is to say about the Christian life but if a church is pursuing these things you will find an imperfect but vibrant body of believers
- F. Further JOHN 13:34 - love looks like something
- G. With that in mind - here are 7 Gospel Culture values - each one a series - broad strokes

- 1. Humility**
 - a) “honestly assessing ourselves in light of God’s holiness and our sinfulness” - in this place of humility before God we position ourselves to receive his grace. In humility we embrace the mind of Christ (Phil. 2) and count others as more important than ourselves - why - because of the Gospel - Christ counted us as more important than his own life
- 2. Godliness**
 - a) We are saved and kept by the grace of God, accounted as righteous in Christ, nothing can separate, he will hold us fast FAR FROM APATHY - now through the Spirit’s work in us - we have the desire to get to work putting off our former way of life and putting on righteousness and holiness. We aim to kill sin in the power of the Holy Spirit and earnestly pursue growing to be more like Jesus because of God’s grace. Doesn’t grace mean it doesn’t matter how I live - DON’T TALK LIKE THAT!
- 3. Serving**
 - a) We follow a Savior who came not to be served but to serve us by dying in our place to bring us to God. His service towards us in the cross not only gives us an example to emulate but provides the grace we need so that serving others for the glory of God is made possible. We don’t serve simply because it’s needed or it’s nice - eager to serve others because of grace
- 4. Generosity**
 - a) “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” (2 Cor. 8:9) When we remember the grace of Christ, that he poured out his life so we might have every spiritual blessing, it is our joy to be generous givers. Not only with our finances but also with every resource we have been given. Stingy Christian is an oxymoron - give even when it’s uncomfortable - especially then!
- 5. Gratefulness**
 - a) In light of the grace of God – that we deserve the righteous wrath of God for our sin and have instead received forgiveness, justification, and adoption through the cross of Christ – we of all people should be most grateful and full of thanksgiving. On our worst day WE AREN’T GOING TO HELL - HEAVEN - DON’T YOU CARE?
 - (1) A healthy church culture is marked by a discernible gratitude towards God and toward God’s gracious activity in the life of others. This gratefulness expresses itself in a culture of honoring and encouraging others.
- 6. Fellowship**
 - a) God saves us individually but does so in order to bring us into the community of the church - the people that he has purchased with his own precious blood. Church is not simply the place we go on Sunday to worship for two hours a week but should be the community in which we share our lives together. Grow together as we hear and receive preaching, pray, love - A shared experience of God made possible by his grace - ain’t no country club
- 7. Joy**
 - a) God intends that the Christian life be marked by the presence of joy. Biblical joy comes through the Holy Spirit applying the truth of the gospel to our souls. In SGC we pursue biblical joy by keeping the cross in view so that in every season, whether prospering or suffering, we locate our joy in Christ and not ultimately in our circumstances. We find unshakable evidence of God’s loyal love and faithfulness in Christ - even in tears
- H. Gospel Culture - Humility, Godliness, Serving, Generosity, Gratefulness, Fellowship, Joy - this is the fruit and effect of the Gospel

1. I want to be in a church like that don't you?
 - a) What's the alternative - Proud, worldly, self-serving, stingy, grumbling, isolated, discontent
 - b) OH IN THIS WORLD OF SELFISHNESS, SELF-CENTEREDNESS, ME-FIRST - OH how this culture of grace stands out like stars in the darkness of this world - COMMEND LHC - THEY TELL ME!
 - (1) Whenever these things are absent? Gospel problem - hearts unaffected
 - (2) Maybe God has pricked your soul with conviction about one or more of these things - GOOD NEWS press into Jesus - take hold of his grace - believe the gospel afresh and know that he is at work in you to produce the fruit he intends for you to produce
 - (3) These are the targets for growing disciples in a local church - write 'em down, talk about them, pray, study the Scriptures

I. Application

1. Grow as disciples
2. That's all well and good but how does function beyond the context of the church? How does our Gospel culture inform and empower mission? What does this have to do with evangelism and outreach?

II. How Does Gospel Culture Empower Mission?

- A. Not my idea - heaven forbid - rooted in the greatest description of church life I know of in the NT - turn in your Bibles - a few texts

[42] And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. [43] And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. [44] And all who believed were together and had all things in common. [45] And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. [46] And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

- B. Acts 2 - day of Pentecost - Peter preaches - 3,000 believe the gospel and are saved - immediately fall into community with all the marks of the Gospel Culture we've been talking about
 1. Humility, fellowship, godliness, serving, grateful receiving with, gladness - joy, generosity - it's all there - tuck away in v. 47 is an important and instructive principle - in the middle of this vibrant Gospel culture v. 47 - having favor with all the people - the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved
 - a) How were they saved - only way they can be - Gospel preached and believed - Yes - in the context of this FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE played a vital role - because of their Gospel culture people who didn't know Jesus saw the beauty of their Gospel culture and God used that beauty to draw them even as the Gospel was proclaimed in fullness and power - added to number
- C. Gospel culture - a church that embraces and enjoys the realities of the Gospel as growing disciples not only has the effect of powerful comfort and growth in the lives of the Christians

who are a part of the church - it has the powerful effect of communicating the beauty of who Jesus is to a watching world

- D. OUR TEXT - John 13:34-35 - through your love - "all people will know" NOT BY LOVE FOR THEM - MATTERS
 - 1. John 17

[20] "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. (John 17:20-23)

- a) There is a message - an apologetic - an argument that God presents to the world through our love and unity - all people will know we are disciples by love - our unity communicates that the Son was sent from the Father - Gospel culture creates an impression on a watching world - favor with others as God works in the hearts of the lost and the Gospel is adorned with the imperfect but actual beauty of his gracious activity in our lives.

The gospel does not hang in midair as an abstraction. By the power of God, the gospel creates something new in the world today. It creates not just a new community, but a new kind of community. Gospel-centered churches are living proof that the good news is true, that Jesus is not a theory but is real, as he gives back to us our humanness. In its doctrine and culture, words and deeds, such a church makes visible the restored humanity only Christ can give. (Ray Ortland, *The Gospel: How the Church Portrays the Beauty of Christ*, p. 65)

- E. One way to think about shared mission as a church - love one another - OPEN ARMS AND INVITE OTHERS INTO experience and see and understand what God intends to communicate through Gospel culture even as we earnestly look for ways to communicate verbally the good news of Christ and him crucified and risen from the dead must hear to be saved
- F. How does this work? 2 Examples
 - 1. GDOLL - HELP MET GET TO HEAVEN
 - 2. The Bridge Course - woman who says "God is in these people"
- G. SHE IS RIGHT - OH SHE IS RIGHT - GOD IS IN US - GOD IS AMONG US - CAN THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST BE OTHER THAN THAT WHICH TRANSFORMS US AND CREATES IN US AN EARNEST AND EAGER DESIRE TO BE FAITHFUL IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES
 - 1. PRIVILEGE AND RESPONSIBILITY AND JOY TO MAKE VISIBLE THE RESTORED HUMANITY THAT ONLY JESUS CAN GIVE
 - 2. God is pleased to use ordinary lives of faithfulness to adorn the gospel in such a way that there is favor, there is awareness that Jesus is real
 - 3. Gospel doctrine and Gospel culture = power

H. Application

1. How can this function for us? Application set the bar low - something foundational - NOT TALKING ABOUT EVANGELISTS - ORDINARY, SUFFERING, WEAK, BUSY
 - a) Pursue hospitality with gospel intentionality - hospitality in effect draws gospel culture threads together - open up our homes and lives and pursue humility, serving, generosity, sharing and receiving with gratefulness - gospel culture and invite others in to experience so that we may make visible what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives and create contexts to share what Jesus has done for us on the cross.
 - (1) NEIGHBOR LOVE
 - b) Low bar - but can feel challenging - busy, inconvenience

Hospitality will lead to “collateral damage.” Food will be spilled on your carpet. You’ll be left with clearing up. Your pantry may be decimated. But remember that God is welcoming you into his home through the blood of his own Son. The hospitality of God embodied in the table fellowship of Jesus is a celebration and sign of his grace and generosity. And we’re to imitate that generosity. (Tim Chester, *A Meal With Jesus*, p. 49)

- (1) Thursdays in July - Kate prays with neighbor
- (2) In the context of hospitality - take steps (Tim Keller)
 - (a) Let people know you go to church
 - (b) Let people know you are a Christian and it means something to you
 - (c) Let things bubble up naturally (we do believe that God is sovereign and at work in the world) - anxious or aggressive - attentive
 - (d) Grab hold of opportunities to be bold
- (3) Telling you right now that you will not drift into a life of robust hospitality - encourage you sit down talk with your spouse, kids, those in your small group - pray and think together about how God can use you to reach people far from Jesus by opening your home and pouring out your life in blessing
 - (a) VBS
 - (b) Picnic in August
 - (c) Bridge Course celebration / intro - JULY 3
 - (d) Make a plan, strategize to bless your neighbors, co-workers

I know a church well where people have hosted home evangelism meetings. They invite neighbors, coworkers, and friends into their homes for the expressed purpose of hearing a guest talk about Jesus Christ and answering their questions about Christianity and the Bible. The hosts may not feel confident about their ability to articulate the gospel, especially to groups of people, but by serving through hospitality, they provide an opportunity for evangelism by someone whose strength is a verbal presentation of the gospel. By opening up their homes and working with other believers, evangelism takes place that wouldn’t have happened otherwise. (Donald Whitney in *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, p 132-133)

2. Expectation high
 - a) God is pleased to move his mission forward through the simple and faithful efforts of his people - imperfectly but faithfully presenting to the world the reality of what Jesus does in the hearts of those who trust him as we seek to connect them with the good news they must hear if they will be saved

- b) Lift up the Son with your life and your words - grasp the glory of Jesus for yourself and experience his life-changing grace and step out in faith inviting others into the glories of his grace.
- 3. A word to those who feel weak and who know failures, who am I to be used in this way?

Illustration: Keith Jarrett - 1975 - 17-year-old girl - Cologne Germany - perfectionist - improviser

- 4. I'm the worst little piano in the world - look at the mess in my life - NATURE OF THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST - WEAK - FOOLISH - THAT'S THE ONE I WANT! He takes his rightful place and plays the beautiful music of the gospel in and through our lives - yep - we get the grace - he gets the glory - and we have the joy of entering into his mission

Close

Preach the gospel and use words if necessary - feed the hungry and use food if necessary

Gospel doctrine + Gospel culture = power

This is the missional power of Gospel Culture

Friends, let us set ourselves anew to humility, godliness, fellowship, serving, gratefulness, generosity, and joy for our good for the strengthening of the brothers and sisters in this church.

Let us be those who open our arms, invite the lost and the broken in, make visible imperfectly but truly the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ so that they will come to know and believe the Gospel - let us join Christ as he builds his church and in doing so bring glory to his name. Amen

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