

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 — “The Preaching & Success of the Gospel” 哥林多前书 2:1-5 — “福音的传讲与成功”

READ THE TEXT

1 Corinthians 2:1-5(NASB1995)

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the ^[a]testimony of God. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my ^[b]message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not ^[c]rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

INTRO

Introductory Illustration

- So much contemporary ministry is **results driven** rather than **obedience-driven**.
 - ✓ Sadly, Preaching is more about getting a CROWD than about glorifying the LORD.
 - ✓ Many speakers now want to fill the PEWS instead of filling the PULPIT.
 - ✓ Lots of gurus speak “here's the way to relevancy” instead of “Here's the WORD of the LORD!
- And many churches may explode in size —> and hit the news, and be a marvel to many, and have the latest building project; and a hip new leader, and sweet entertainment gadgets in the services — ****BUT****— is this “Success?”
- What about the small rural church, w/ a pastor who served for 50+ years faithfully plodding along, preaching the text, expounding books of the Bible, loving His people, shepherding house to house, visiting the shut-ins, rejoicing with the newborns, caring for the sick, and counseling the hurting—and the membership roster never gets above 35. ***is that small church a ‘success’?***
- 1 Cor 4.2- Success in ministry (and Christian living) is faithfulness to what God calls you to.
 - Success is faithfulness
 - You may see growth, or diminishing numbers.
 - You may be liked, or hated & despised & killed.
 - You may be popularized, or trekking along unknown by many.

THESIS — How do we know if we are being “successful” and “effective” in what we do? How do we measure this? From God’s Word, I want to show you clearly that we must be *faithful to do what God calls us to do.*

- I. Our COMMITMENT to the **PREACHING** of the gospel (2.1-5)
- II. Our COMFORT in the **SUCCESS** of the gospel (2.4-5)

I. OUR COMMITMENT TO THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL (2.1-5)

- answers the question: *What must we do?*

- What is Paul's commitment to the Church? What must be *our* commitment? My commitment?

- A. What we refuse — worldly wisdom (1, 4)
 1. worldly wisdom—thinking devoid of God // who am I? / why am I here? / where am I going? / humanism, relativism, pluralism, worldly psychology, sociology, anthropology. > i don't come with any of that stuff.
 2. For instance: *Orators came to Corinth with what's known as “beautiful speech.” it was said of one popular speaker, FAVORINUS, that his eloquence was both “WISE” and ‘SWEET’. He would allure his audience with his voice, — variations, intonations, fluctuations and emphases in his voice.*

- B. Who we preach - Jesus Christ - crucified! (2, 4-5)
 1. My passion [I have made a legal decision; a public testimony; a firm resolve] is the Person of Christ! And His **crucifixion!**
 2. **v.3-** weakness, fear, trembling; not persuasive words, but in **demonstration** [ἀποδείξει—legal proof] **of the Spirit & of (divine) power** [divine ability; strength; inherent power]!
 3. **The preacher's job** is *not* to convert, regenerate, make people hear, ensure people obey.
 4. As RL Dabney once explained the word “*preach*”—The preacher is a herald; his work is heralding the King's message. . . . Now the herald does not invent his message; he merely transmits and explains it. It is not his to criticize its wisdom or fitness; this belongs to his sovereign alone. Now the workman's business is not to criticize, recarve, or erase anything in the die which was committed to him; but simply to press it down faithfully upon the substance to be impressed, observing the conditions of the work assigned him in his instructions. So it is, The preacher's business is to take what is given him in the Scriptures, as it is given to him, and to endeavour to imprint it on the souls of men. All else is God's work.

- C. I will not come with worldly methods to please the world (1)
- D. I'm passionately determined to know & preach Christ (2)
- E. I'm a man of weakness, fear & inability (3)
- F. My message is not worldly, earthly or winsome (4a)
- G. My message demonstrates God's power at work (4b)
- H. So believer's faith rests soundly on God's power (5)
- I. THAT MEANS
 1. you could have a thriving, growing, snazzy church —> and still be a worldling, a failure, a disgrace, and a charlatan.
 2. You could have a small, diminishing, older church, with many open seats —> and be faithful, obedient, joyous & rewarded!
 3. Did you notice: in vv.1-5- Paul explains his ministry & wants to be faithful to God. ***he says nothing** about church size, church growth, look of building, office staff, programs*, cultural transformation, financial success, worldly recognitions, websites.
- J. in summary: vv.1-5 -
 1. Paul's *message*: Preaching Christ! (1-2)

2. Paul’s *method*: Power of the Spirit! (3-4)

3. Paul’s *motive*: Faith in God’s power! (5)

K. It’s like William Huntington—a powerful preacher of the Word in England. He was a fisher of men; a preacher of the Word; a carer for souls.

L. He constantly encountered storms of contempt, slander, hatred from enemies of the gospel.

M. Why? Because he broke up and shattered their idols by his biblical preaching & it shattered their hopes so they were left to attack the man who exposed their evils. Many of his writings were published & enjoyed after he died [he never saw much of his ministry-fruit!]. Like Paul, he had a commitment to the preaching of the gospel. He was faithful even though many didn’t like him. He was faithful even though many scorned his efforts. (**Jeremiah can relate!**)

II. OUR COMFORT IN THE SUCCESS OF THE GOSPEL (2.4-5; 3.5-9)

- One educational institution gave counsel to businesses: you can measure success by the way: (1) clients find you (2) customers refer others to you (3) the news media/other companies find out about you (4) the growth of business & ability to employ more people >> *AND*—Making a profit always must be a part of the definition of “Success”
- Another author & small-business coach said: There’s one ultimate way to determine success. The answer lies in answering one question: **How happy am I?**
- Other metrics for success can be: increased profit // greater recognition/influence // making the world a happier place // more money, more freedom // self-worth, feeling good about self // loving what you do. >> **is this really “success?” (how God defines it)**

✓**The effectiveness of the Christian is *always* marked by *faithfulness to God’s Word, NOT results in the world/ministry.***

- answers the question: how do we know it’s *effective*?

(1) The Extolling of Jesus Christ (2.2)

(2) The Empowering of the Spirit (2.4-5)

(3) The Effectiveness from the Father (3.5-9)

D. A Christian in a subway station in NYC has a bag full of gospel tracts. Hands a tract out to a person who receives it. They take it on the train with them. Then they scoff and set it down on the seat next to them on the subway train. Later on, someone enters the train and sits down and sees the gospel tract on the empty seat. Curiously picks it up, reads it and GOD SAVES THEM.

E. A young 15-year-old man stumbles into the back of a sanctuary to hear a Preacher giving the gospel. He leaves unchanged, unaffected, unrepentant. 85-years later when he is now 100 years old, the Spirit of God AWAKENS his soul to remember the message he heard as a teenager — including the sermon outline itself! — and God saved the man!

F. I want to show you & give a *trumpet blast* for faithfulness — not results [an *obedience-driven* ministry and *not* a *results-driven* ministry]

G. steadfast obedience to God not visible results

1. **GOD by His power produces His results (v.4-5)**
2. **our job is to be faithful to Him (3:5-9; 4.1-2)**

H. GOD is the goal, not man.

1. Success is when your joyful obedience is rooted IN JESUS himself; not in doing things for Jesus. That is, we want to love the BEAUTY of Jesus; not just the ministry for Jesus.
2. Our goal is *faithfulness TO God, not just FRUITFULNESS for God*. William Carey went to India and for 7 years evangelized, prayed & preached & saw *no converts*. You discipline, evangelize, teach & instruct your kids & wonder if you’ll see any *spiritual fruit*? You preach on the street and wonder: *is God saving souls?*
3. The point: **success** is **not** determined by the visible FRUIT but by your obedient faithfulness! [*ministry of Jesus & Jeremiah & Paul proves this!*]

I. beware of worldly ’success’ - pursue biblical faithfulness.

- Does this mean we don’t CARE about numbers? No
- Does it mean we don’t care about visible fruit? No
- Does it mean we aren’t interested in God saving people? NO
- Does it mean we are heartless, careless, passionless in ministry? NO
- a) It means that our **motive** and our **ambition** is to faithfully discharge the duty God has given — joyfully // worshipfully // heartily // enthusiastically // obediently // completely.

J. The God-hating Emperor Trajan in in about 108 AD — He pursued 2 brothers — who were Christians in Jesus Christ—Faustines and Jovita.

1. their torments were so many, and their patience so great, that Calocerius, a pagan, beholding them, was struck with admiration, and exclaimed in a kind of ecstasy, "Great is the God of the Christians!" for which he was apprehended, and suffered a similar fate.
2. Two unpopular people seeking God, serving God, suffering for God, and martyred for God.
3. >> And the eternal destiny of a pagan was altered in that moment thru their faithfulness!!!

K. The point: you must remain faithful even when it seems you’re not being fruitful.

L. see 1 Corinthians 3:5-9

1. context: factions, divisions, schisms in the church
2. clarification:
 - We are mere SERVANTS (5a)
 - God gives different ROLES (6)
 - No glory/fame for us but GOD (7)
 - GOD brings all gospel growth (7b)
 - Each is rewarded according to his own “labor/work” (8)
 - We belong to God; it’s about HIM (9)

- a) You can be a successful Christian as you're faithful to God where he's called you —
- **Retired** man/woman – serving, caring, praying, encouraging, discipling, supporting
 - Stay at home **mother** - discipling, teaching, disciplining, loving kids, loving husband
 - **Believer** married to an unbeliever - seeking to love them unconditionally, faithfully & diligently as you prayerfully seek to live a Christlike life and engage in loving, patient, diligent gospel opportunities.
 - **Working** man - work with all your heart to God, for his glory; whatever your hand finds to do, with all your might – for God.
 - **Pastor** - praying, studying, shepherding, heralding.
 - **Teacher** - teaching your subjects joyfully, honestly & with a thankful heart to God!
 - Church-**member** - seeking to obey Christ and love the brethren faithfully.
3. maybe your business thrives; maybe it doesn't.
4. maybe your kids go to college; maybe they don't.
5. maybe some come to Christ; maybe some reject him.
6. maybe the church increases; maybe it decreases.
7. maybe the neighborhood sees & believes; maybe it opposes, mocks & brings great shame.
8. maybe our preaching brings revival; maybe God uses it to harden sinners & increase their condemnation.
- a) Q: are you faithful to God? // remember: God told Noah to build the ark & he was a preacher of righteousness: but no one heeded (2 Pet 2.5) // God sent prophets again & again to Judah but the people mocked & scoffed & killed them (2 Chron 36.15-16).
- b) SO a Christian who faithfully communicates the gospel will be asked: “How many people have you led to Christ?” His answer should be: “ALL OF THEM” — people are led to the cross of Christ & what happens next is up to the Lord (to save or not). >> **but they were faithful in their labor!**
- M. 1 Cor 3.8**—God will reward you according to your own WORK [κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον] >> Labor, strenuous efforts in Christian ministry; (1 Cor 15.58); labor of love which prompts and perseveres for the salvation of others (1 THESS 1.3).
- N.** So, to be ‘effective/successful’, what’s your job?
1. Fulfill your ministry — COL 4.17 - like Archippus - Consider the ministry that you’ve received in the Lord — and **fulfill it**.
 2. Fulfill your ministry — 2 Tim 4.5 — like Timothy: be sober in all things: endure hardship; do the work of an evangelist; **fulfill your ministry**.
- O.** you measure success by FAITHFULNESS TO JESUS CHRIST.
1. What does Jesus want? **Matt 25**
 2. we are to be **WATCHING** (25:1-13) - virgins teach us to **watch**
 3. we are to be **WORKING** (25:14-30) - talents teach us to **work**
 - a) JI Packer wrote: “Our part is to be faithful in making the gospel known, sure that such labor will never be in vain” (in *Evangelism & Sovereignty of God*).
- P. 1 COR 4.1-2**

1. My **Identity** - I'm a servant of Christ & a steward of his Truth
2. My **Responsibility** - it's required of me to be TRUSTWORTHY = FAITHFUL.

Q. Some supporting texts:

1. **Consider ROMANS 16** — list of faithful soldiers in the Church at Rome — not well known, not popular, but faithful >>> Phoebe (1) // Prisca and Aquila (3) // Epaenetus (5) // Mary (6) // Andronicus (7) // Junias (7) // Ampliatus (8) // Urbanus (9) // Stachys (9) // Apelles (10) // Herodion (11) // Tryphaena, Tryphosa (12) // Persis (12) // RUFUS (13)

R. So we must be *faithful* to preach Christ & we must be *fixated on faithfulness* to Christ. Let God handle fruitfulness, you commit yourself to *faithfulness*. To God be the glory.

CONCL-

Concluding Illustration

- Luke 17:10 “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”
- **It was said that Billy Graham during his last crusade in NYC in 2005 said:**
 - “I have one message: that Jesus Christ came, he died on a cross, he rose again, and he asked us to repent of our sins and receive Christ by faith as Lord and Savior, and if we do we have forgiveness of all our sin.”
 - Billy Graham said: I knew the sweetness and joy of God, of being truly born again.”
 - Billy Graham, as a young man, while studying in Tampa Florida, Graham got down on his knees by the eighteenth green of a neighboring golf course and yielded his life completely to the Lord’s service.
- Now Billy Graham has passed away, or as he said, “changed my address and gone into the presence of the Lord.”
 - He longed to hear the Master say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”
 - You & I may not be a Billy Graham.
 - But you are: who God made you to be & Where God has put you.
 - So Faithfully Serve God & Discharge your duty & this will be SUCCESSFUL in God’s eyes. & YOU can long to hear: “*Well Done good and FAITHFUL SERVANT*”