

SERMON: *Deep and Wide*
 SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Isaiah 6:1-9
 SPEAKER: Pastor Josh Black
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Evangelical?

First Free is an evangelical church. The word evangelical is right there in our name; First Evangelical Free Church. So, being evangelical must be important to us, right? But what does it mean that we're evangelical and why is it important? My sixth daughter is named Beatrice Evangeline Black. Do you notice something similar between the name of our church and my daughter's middle name? It's the root word "evangel." It's a very important word to me. Do you know what the word "Evangeline" means? And why is it so important to me? Well, I'm glad you asked.

"Evangel" is a Greek root word which means "good" (ev-) "news" (angel), quite literally. We normally translate the word as "gospel" in our Bibles. The gospel is very important to me and it is very important to this church. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul tells us that the gospel is of first importance. Whatever else it means to be an evangelical, at the core being an evangelical is being a gospel person. To be an evangelical church is to be a church that is defined by the gospel; to be a church that makes the gospel of first importance.

My vision for this church and my life is really quite simple. I want us to be evangelical in the truest sense of the word. It is my prayer that the gospel would completely define this church and define my life.

Sermon in a sentence: Because the gospel is of first importance, it should grow deep in God's people and go wide to all peoples for God's glory.

We're going to take a break from our study in the book of John to talk about the significance of the gospel in the lives of Christians and how it can further define this church's identity. In order to do that, we need to do three things: Define the gospel, determine why it is so important, and consider some ways we can let this gospel go deep and wide. First: What is the gospel?

Defining the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 (ESV)

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,² and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you— unless you believed in vain.

³*For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...*

The gospel is the good news that Christ died for our sins.

At the core, the gospel is the message that Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead. It is the announcement of what God has done in Jesus Christ to save his people from their sins. Or to put it another way, it is a news report about the most amazing event that ever happened in the history of the world. It is good news.

This is a short summary of what the gospel is: Christ died for our sins (on five fingers). This is something we can hang on to. And it's something we need to hang on to as evangelical Christians. The gospel is good news. But why is it good news?

Why is the gospel good news?

As we read 1 Corinthians 15:3 in the context of the rest of Scripture it becomes clear why this gospel is good news. We don't have time to look at the rest of Scripture in forty-five minutes. So, please allow me to suggest a structure in which this news becomes clearly good news: Glory, Grace, Go. (You'll notice that structure is on the front of our bulletins.) If we place the gospel in this structure we begin to see how the gospel is good news.

You may have noticed that we used the first few verses from Isaiah 6 throughout our service this morning. It was intentional. Turn there in your Bibles. There is a Glory (vv. 1-5) – Grace (vv. 6-7) – Go (vv. 8-9) pattern in Isaiah 6 that helps us understand why Jesus' death and resurrection are good news.

Isaiah 6:1-4 (ESV)

“In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ²Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’ ⁴And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.”

God is Glorious.

God is indeed glorious. Isaiah sees this. And what is his response?

Isaiah 6:5 (ESV)

“And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’”

Man is Sinful.

When Isaiah sees God in his glory he is very aware that he is a sinner. As we are exposed to God in his glory we become more aware of our sinfulness.¹ We see this in Romans as well as Isaiah.

¹ “...Scripture commonly represents the saints as stricken and overcome whenever they felt the presence of God. Thus it comes about that we see men who in [God's] absence normally remain firm and constant, but who, when he manifests [God's] glory, are so shaken and struck dumb as to be laid low by the dread of death – are in fact overwhelmed by it and almost annihilated. As a consequence, we must infer that man is never sufficiently touched

Romans 3:23 (ESV)

“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Romans 6:23 (ESV)

“For the wages of sin is death...”

God is holy and as a holy God he must judge sin. The judgment for sin is eternal death. For sinners like you and me this is bad news. Don't you hate it when people say, “What do you want first, the good news or the bad news?” This is never a great lead-in because we know that the bad news will usually trump the good news. But that is not the case with the gospel.

We have to hear the bad news before we can understand the good news. But the good news of the gospel is stronger than the bad news of judgment. Isaiah understands the bad news that he is a sinner in the presence of God's glory, but look at what happens next.

Isaiah 6:6-7 (ESV)

“Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷And he touched my mouth and said: ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.’”

God is Gracious.

In the light of God's glory man should see his sin clearly. But when man comes to see the darkness of his sin the grace of God can shine as bright as the morning sun. When we come to understand the bad news that we are dead in our sin the news that Christ died for our sins will be truly good news. Paul does a good job of keeping the bad news and the good news together. Let me read a few examples for you.

Romans 6:23 (ESV)

“For the wages of sin is death [bad news], but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord [good news].”

Titus 3:3-6 (ESV)

“For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another [bad news]. ⁴But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy... ⁶through Jesus Christ... [good news].”

Ephesians 2:1-8 (ESV)

“And you were dead in your sins... ³and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind [bad news]. ⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us... ⁵made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved... ⁸through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God... [good news].”

and affected by the awareness of his lowly state until he has compared himself with God's majesty” (John Calvin. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, pp. 38-39.).

This pattern we see in Isaiah, Isaiah we see throughout the whole Bible. When we see God in his glory, we will see our sin more clearly and our need for grace. When we see the bad news, the news that Christ died for our sin will truly be good news. This construct helps us understand the gospel. But there is another movement in the Isaiah passage that is important for us not to miss.

Isaiah 6:8-9 (ESV)

“And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ Then I said, ‘Here am I! Send me.’⁹ And he said, ‘Go...’”

Man is commissioned to go.

After we have seen God’s glory and been assured of his grace God calls his people to go. God saves people from their sin, but God also uses his people for his purposes. After Isaiah’s sin is atoned for he is commissioned to go and speak God’s word. We see the same pattern in the Gospels. After Jesus died and rose from the dead, making atonement for our sins, he says “go.”

Matthew 28:18-19 (ESV)

“... ‘All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.¹⁹ Go, therefore and make disciples of all nations...’”

As the gospel gets deep into us it needs to go wide from us. So there is a Glory-Grace-Go pattern to the life of God’s people. It is in this structure that the gospel makes sense to us. It is in this structure that the gospel is indeed good news.

First Importance

Not only is this gospel good news, but 1 Corinthians 15:3 tells us the gospel is of first importance. But why is the gospel so important and how do we keep this good news as first importance in our lives and in this church?

First of all we have to dispel a myth that many have bought into. The myth is that the gospel is only the front door of the house; a message that only gets you into the kingdom. Many have come to believe that the gospel is *only* a message to be used in evangelism; it’s a message for others, but then once people are saved we need to move on to the real important matters of discipleship, obedience, spiritual disciplines, acts of service, sanctification, etc.

Now, we *are* called to preach the gospel in evangelism. And we *are* called to pursue discipleship, obedience, spiritual disciplines, acts of service, sanctification, and the like, but not by leaving the gospel behind.

The gospel covers and supports the whole Christian life.

The Bible doesn’t present the gospel as the front door. The gospel is actually the message that supports and covers the whole house; it’s the roof and the foundation; it supports and covers the whole Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 15:2 Paul tells us that we need to hold fast to the gospel until the end. Paul says something similar in Colossians.

Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

“...continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard...”

It’s amazing to me that when Paul writes to the churches he spends so much of his time explaining the significance of the gospel. He writes to churches that have already believed the gospel, but he continues to talk about the gospel at every turn; he treats the gospel as if it were... well, of first importance.

Remember that earlier we defined the gospel as the message that Christ died for our sins. Some people today are defining the gospel in a different way; they are saying that the gospel is essentially the great commandment to love God and love people, especially people who are poor and being oppressed. People who define the gospel this way are saying we need to “be the gospel.”

The great commandment is important, so important that Jesus said that all of the law and prophets hang on these commandments (Mt. 22:37-40). And it is true that we are to care for the poor and oppressed. But the great commandment is not the gospel. The great commandment is about what *we* are called to do. The gospel is the announcement of what *God* has done in Jesus Christ to save his people from their sins. You can’t be the gospel or live out the gospel! The gospel is good news about what God has already done in sending his Son to die for our sins.

However, Paul does see our obedience as connected with the gospel; we can live lives that are consistent with the gospel. When Paul gives instructions to the churches he always roots commands in the truths of the gospel. That is why I say the gospel isn’t just the front door to the house; the gospel supports and covers the whole house. Let me give you some examples.

Ephesians 4:32 (ESV)

“Forgiv[e] one another [command] as God in Christ forgave you [gospel truth].”

Romans 12:1

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God [gospel truth], to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...[command].”

The generosity commanded in 2 Corinthians 8-9 is intended to flow out of the confession of the gospel of Christ (2 Cor. 9:13).

2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV)

“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” [gospel truth].

Ephesians 5:25 (ESV)

“Husbands, love your wives [command], as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... [gospel truth].”

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (ESV)

“Flee from sexual immorality... [command]...²⁰ for you were bought with a price [gospel truth].”

I could keep going through much of Paul’s letters. But the point is to show you that there is not a graduate course beyond the gospel. The gospel is the first message we hear and the truths that flow from the gospel define the rest of the Christian life and obedience. It supports and covers the whole Christian life. The gospel is of first importance.

Have we kept the gospel of first importance in our churches and in our lives? And what are the dangers if we fail to keep the gospel of first importance.

Without gospel-centrality we tend toward pride or despair.

We are all legalists by nature and we tend toward one of two extremes, either pride from our perceived ability to keep the law or despair from our failure to keep the law, or to measure up. And that is the second reason why the gospel is so important; without it we tend toward pride or despair. Let me explain.

I heard Francis Chan speak on Thursday night. I think Francis has a great ministry and is an important voice in the evangelical church today. And he did an excellent job on Thursday night. But the longer I’m a pastor the more I filter everything through the lens of being a pastor. And let me say, as your pastor, I was a little concerned on Thursday night by what happened.

Everything Francis said was right-on and I bet most of you who were there really liked what he had to say. He told us over and over again that we need to take God at his word and obey God’s Word. He gave all kinds of examples, though one of his biggest emphases these days is ministering to the urban poor. So far, so good, right? In fact, everything he said was really good. My concern was not in what Francis said, but in what he failed to say.

For forty-five minutes Francis called us to “obey the law” but not once in his entire talk did he link the imperatives of Scripture to the gospel. Not once did he say we need to serve the poor out of the abundance of all we have in Christ. Not once did he say we need to love others because Christ first loved us. I know that he believes that, because I’ve heard him say it elsewhere. But if you assume the gospel for one minute you are in danger of losing the gospel the next minute.

We must keep the gospel central at every turn. Otherwise we will leave like I did feeling discouraged that we don’t measure up to God’s commands, or we could leave feeling proud. If you are involved in ministry to the poor, you may leave thinking, “I’m doing that; if only other people would start doing it.”

Gospel-centrality enables humble confidence.

If on the other hand we keep the gospel connected to the commandments we can be confident while still being humble. When we fail to keep the commandments we can be confident knowing that our security is in the fact that Christ kept the commandments; he loved the poor and served them perfectly. We can have confidence because our hope is not based on what we do or what we fail to do. Our identity is wrapped up entirely in what Christ did for us. Our hope

is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. And when we do keep the commandments we can do so humbly knowing that it is a result of the work of God in our lives. If we keep the gospel central we won't view ourselves as better than other people, for we know that we are sinners saved by grace.

Please hear me. I'm not trying to throw Francis Chan under the bus. I really appreciate his ministry. But I do want to illustrate how easy it is for any of us to lose sight of the gospel.

Today is Orphan Sunday. This is the day that we remember James 1:27

James 1:27 (ESV)

“Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

Judy Hollander, our Children's Ministry director, sent me a video a few weeks ago about orphan care that really draws out what I'm trying to say about keeping God's commands connected with his gospel truths. I'd like to show it to you (<http://orphansunday.org/resources/>). Pay attention to the commands, the gospel truths, and how they hold together.

[Script, both text and spoken]

“The need is vast. One defenseless child alone multiplied by tens of millions. 15 million orphans worldwide have lost both parents. A half-million children in the U.S. live in Foster Care.

“The call is unmistakable. ‘Defend the cause of the fatherless’ (Isaiah 1:17). A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. ‘God sets the lonely in families...’ (Psalm 68:5-6). ‘Pure and faultless religion is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.’ (James 1:27).

“The motivation is boundless. This is love not that we loved God but that he loved us. He adopted us when we were destitute and alone. He invites us to call him father and live as his sons and daughters. So we defend the fatherless because he has defended us. We care for the orphan in her destitution because he cared for us in ours. We set the lonely in families because he set us in his. Foster care, adoption, orphan care: we love because he first loved us.”

This is a great illustration of how we keep the commands of Scripture connected with the gospel of grace. But you may be wondering, how can I keep the gospel central in my life? I want to offer two strategies for us.

How to keep the gospel central

Preach the gospel to yourself daily.

First of all, marinate yourself in the gospel every day. And the way you do that is by preaching the gospel to yourself. I'm not going to go into how to preach the gospel to yourself, but I've asked Jan Steinert, our church librarian, to put fifteen books on display in the library that all give some kind of help in how to saturate yourself in the gospel. I will also post an extensive bibliography (below). I encourage you to check the books out or buy them for yourself. Learn

how to preach the gospel to yourself from guys like C.J. Mahaney, Jerry Bridges, and Milton Vincent.

Attend corporate worship.

The second strategy I want to focus on this morning may be different than you would have guessed. You can saturate yourself in the gospel every Sunday by attending this worship service. That may seem a little self-serving, so let me explain.

Andy and I have put together a little team that plans the worship service every week. Susan Dorsey, Sarah Anderson, Jim Logan, and Julie Egy serve on the team with Andy and me. We have been working together to create gospel-shaped worship services. However, some of the things we're doing are so subtle that we wanted to show you this morning exactly what we're doing so that you will be able to more fully engage in worship and have the gospel form you.

In Scripture we're only commanded to do a few things when we gather together for worship. We're commanded to read the word (1 Tim 4:13), preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2), pray (1 Tim 2:1), sing (Col 3:16; Eph 5:19), observe the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Lk 22:19; Mt. 28:19).² We've been doing these things for as long as this church has existed. But as of late we're viewing each of these as an opportunity to go deeper in the gospel. Let me go through each of the commands and show you how we're trying to create gospel-shaped worship services.

Read the gospel (1 Tim. 4:13).

We read the Word every week. And we generally stand as we read the Word. The reason we stand is to honor the Word of God as the Word of God; God actually speaks to us through his Word. And after the Word is read I say, "This is the Word of the Lord," and we generally respond by saying, "Thanks be to God." Some of you may think that is too "catholic." I actually learned about this litany from the Church of England, but where it comes from isn't as important. It is the Word of God, so we say so, and we are thankful for it, for through it we are given life, so we say so.

Preach the gospel (2 Tim 4:2)

As your pastor I'm commanded to preach the Word (2 Tim 4:2). It is my commitment to not only preach the Word, but to preach the gospel every Sunday, to preach Christ crucified (1 Cor. 2:2). If all Scripture points to Christ (as Dick will show us in John 5:39 next week) then every sermon will point to Christ; I'm committed to that. I hope that the preaching of the Word will help you understand the gospel and form you in the gospel.

Pray the gospel (1 Tim 2:1).

We are commanded to pray for all people (1 Tim 2:1). We try to do this each week, but not only will we pray in this worship gathering, we will pray the gospel.

Many of you have been taught to pray using the ACTS acronym: Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It is a great model. Pay close attention to the prayers each week and you will notice that we follow a similar pattern.

² Dever, Mark, and Paul Alexander. *The Deliberate Church: Building Your Ministry on the Gospel*, pp. 81-88.

- **Invocation:** We start with an invocation, asking God to meet with us as we gather for worship and help us see Jesus.
- **Adoration:** Following the invocation we will generally focus on the glory of God; we will offer a prayer of adoration.
- **Confession:** In view of God's glory we will see our sin and be led to offer a prayer of confession in some form or another.
- **Thanksgiving:** Following the prayer of confession we will always be assured of God's grace in the gospel. In view of God's mercy there will be a prayer of thanksgiving for the grace given to us in Christ.
- **Supplication:** And because of who we are in Christ we can boldly approach God our Father with prayers of supplication, asking God to supply our needs, comfort us in our grief and sickness, fulfill the great commission, etc. (this is commonly called the pastoral prayer).
- **Illumination:** Before the sermon there will be a prayer of illumination asking God to help us understand his Word, see Jesus, and obey his Word.
- **Benediction:** Finally there will be a benediction at the end of each service, which is a prayer of blessing intended to help us go wide with the gospel, as we go back into the world to live lives consistent with the gospel.

Sometimes these seven prayers are combined into fewer prayers, but you will find these components each week as we gather for gospel-shaped worship. All of these prayers are offered to help us understand the gospel and hopefully form us in the gospel and prepare us as we scatter from here to live lives consistent with the truths of the gospel.

Sing the gospel (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Ephesians 5:19 tells us, we are to sing songs to one another. Now when we sing, we are obviously singing to the Lord (Eph. 5:19b), but Paul tells us that when we sing we also address one another (Eph. 5:19a). Paul tells us in Colossians 3:16 that our songs are a way to teach and admonish one another and a way for the word of Christ dwell in us richly. So we not only sing, but we sing the gospel to build one another up.

As long as I have been in this church there have always been a number of people, who for various reasons, consistently come into the worship services late. One of the reasons, undoubtedly, is they are fellowshiping with other believers; they are building one another up in the courtyard or in their Sunday School rooms. Another reason could be that singing is not their deal and so they come in late or they don't sing when they are here.

Let me gently challenge you to come to our worship services on time. Not because you'll earn God's favor (or mine), but because God has ordained that we sing the gospel to one another to build one another up. When you miss the prayers and singing we do in the first part of the service you are missing out on an opportunity to be grounded in the gospel and an opportunity to build up your brothers and sisters in the gospel.

Our team is very intentional in picking songs that will help us get the gospel deeper into our lives. Andy has a little saying that he constantly reminds us of. At the end of the day, he doesn't want you to say, "What a great song," or "What a great singer;" he wants you to say, "What a

great Savior.” That is an admirable commitment. He does this by picking out gospel-centered songs, but he also does this by picking out songs that, like our prayers, fit into the Glory-Grace-Go pattern of our worship services.

- **Gathering/Glory:** We start out singing songs about gathering together to worship our glorious God (i.e. “Come, Now is the Time to Worship;” “Holy, Holy, Holy;” and “Jesus Shall Reign”).
- **Grace:** Then after a confession of sins we sing songs that tell of the grace of God (i.e. “The Power of the Cross”).
- **Scatter/Go:** Then as we prepare to scatter, we sing a song(s) that prepares us for the week ahead. It prepares us to go wide with the gospel; to live lives that are in keeping with the gospel as we go (i.e. “The Solid Rock”).

See the gospel (Matt. 28:19; Lk 22:14-23).

The Lord gave us two ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. We have baptisms quarterly and celebrate the Lord’s Supper monthly. We have not made any changes in the way we administer these ordinances. They continue to be an incredible way (God’s way) to renew our covenant with the Lord regularly and to remind us of his death and resurrection which edifies us and allows us to proclaim the gospel until he returns.

Let us not neglect to meet together

So, how do we ground ourselves in the gospel? How does the gospel go deep in us? We have to get to know it really well. The content and structure of our corporate worship are designed to help this gospel get deep into us as a family of believers. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with this structure of worship (Glory-Grace-Go). Seek to track with the progression of the service. I think it will help you to understand the gospel and be formed by the gospel. Pay close attention to all of the words that are being read, spoken, sung, and prayed. It is our hope that you would agree with the words and make them your own prayers. Lastly, teach these things to your children to help them engage in what is going on in corporate worship.

If you want the gospel to go deep in your life, I invite you to make a commitment to gather with us for worship every week, where you can pray the gospel, sing the gospel, see the gospel in the ordinances, and hear the gospel preached.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (ESV)

“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

We live our lives each week in a world that is the opposite of the gospel. And like it or not our world shapes us. Instead of emphasizing the glory of God, our world emphasizes the glory of man. Instead of recognizing sin, our world relativizes sin. Instead of acknowledging that we are saved by grace, our world says if you want to amount to anything you need to try harder and look better. Instead of living to serve God our world tells us that you need to serve yourself because you deserve it.

So, when I urge you to make a commitment to gather with us for worship every week I'm not giving you another law to obey. Coming to worship will not earn you favor with God (or me), but it is a great way to get the gospel deep into your life and I trust it will also prepare you to take it wide into the world.

Benediction

Hebrews 13:20-21 (ESV)

“Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, ²¹equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

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