

1 Corinthians 1.1-9

The Living Gospel Part 1 | Seeing through a gospel lens

February 19, 2017 – Spence Shelton

Introduction

Good Morning Mercy Church! What a day we are having today. How about a huge thank you to Chris Gaynor & The Summit Church Choir! Just so you know they all paid their own way down here to serve us this morning because they love our church so much and truly desire to be partners in the advancement of the gospel with us.

Announcement: SUNDAY MARCH 5 – Community Group Sunday

God is growing Mercy Church. No doubt. And as a new church we are still mobile and trying to find the best location that will allow us to be a church for the Charlotte area. Because that is already who we are. And while we are looking for a home the Levine Center here has been a gracious host. But they booked this facility a long time ago for another event on Sunday March 5th. Which means we can't be in here. But, one thing I've learned is that what often seems like an obstacle can become an opportunity if you just step back and look at it for a minute. See we have been saying since day 1 that this is not a church where we want you to just come and watch. Maybe for a little bit, but

then we want you to belong. That's why we press getting into a ministry team and getting into a community group. Those are two easy avenues to get to know some people and for some people to get to know you. So we looked at March 5th through that lens and realized this could be an awesome opportunity for you to get to know some people who live near you. So we ARE having church March 5th. But instead of doing it here, our 15 community groups will be hosting church all around Charlotte that Sunday morning. We are meeting up with group leaders tomorrow and planning the whole thing out. We've got a special message we'll deliver by video and the goal is, if you aren't in a group, to get a free "one time no strings attached" visit to a community group that day. Now, to help our leaders you do have to RSVP. We can't post addresses online and just hope people show up. But its gonna be fun and then we'll be back here the next weekend.

- One last thing: I know this leads some of you to ask when we will be moving. There is a short and long term answer. Short term we are looking for a mobile location that better fits us and hope to have an answer soon. Long term...we are trying to wait on the Lord and trust his timing. Exciting times here at Mercy Church!

Ok with that out of the way... Today we are stepping into a new series where we are going to walk through the book of 1st Corinthians. So if you have your bibles go ahead and bust them out and go to 1 Corinthians Chapter 1 Verse 1. If

you are new with us it's a great week to be new! We are all new to this series together so you aren't late to the party. Welcome!

And listen 1 Corinthians is going to be a really fun book for us. We are going to walk through it from beginning to end & we'll be in it up into summer. Here's why its going to be fun: The Corinthian church was a church Paul planted & stayed with for 18 months...then left to go plant more churches and at year 5 he gets a letter where he learns This church was pretty much the most messed up church the apostle Paul had ever seen. Now they put on their Sunday masks when they came to church, but they had all kinds of issues underneath the surface. And it makes me excited because I think: all kinds of people come to our church. And you probably put on a mask when you come here. But underneath that...you got all kinds of crazy going on. I know you do. You know you do. But be encouraged, this letter is for you and your messed up life. Let me give you the rundown of the mess this church was in:

First their worship gatherings were a disaster:

- **False Teaching** was running rampant & arguments were happening about doctrine. I'm talking big stuff like some thought Jesus' resurrection wasn't literal & some did. Which resulted in chaos.
- People were totally abusing and misusing their spiritual gifts. Paul is going to spend 3 chapters correcting this because instead of using the gifts to

serve each other they were using them as power plays against each other.

- In fact, their use of the gifts were so chaotic & out of wack Paul at one point says listen when new people come to church they think you are smoking the ganja.
- Their communion services were a mess. Poor and rich took communion separately. Rich got their early and got drunk (made for interesting worship), poor came to eat and there was nothing. In fact it was so bad in Chapter 11 that Paul says based on all this, it would be better if you never had worship services at all! This ain't helping anybody.

Second, Their relationships were a disaster

- They couldn't get along! They kept getting mad over small things and kept suing each other and winding up in Judge Judy's courtroom. That's how we know this was most likely a Southern Baptist church.
Joke: *Deacon stranded, 3 huts.* That's my house, my church, my new church, we got concerned about the old one and so we split.
- They kept arguing over religious customs from their backgrounds. The Jewish background believers had all these laws of things you couldn't eat, touch, smoke, or drink. And now they have freedom in Christ from the old law...but to what extent? Can they eat the meat offered to idols? If that isn't relevant to you... "Well can I smoke weed if I am in

Colorado where it is legal?”

Their whole system of morality a disaster

- Corinth was perhaps the most immoral city in the entire Greek region. The word “Corinthianized” meant to become immoral. Big temple in Corinth to Aphrodite, the goddess of sex. Many of them just brought that into the church. Paul is going to talk about one guy who was sleeping with his father’s wife (Stepmom) and nobody was saying hey not cool bro.
- Divorce was a problem; premarital sex and pornography were problems.
- The men were passive and cowardly leaders. Paul says the women during the worship services were disruptive and wearing scandalous clothing.

And that’s just SOME of the issues Paul addresses in this letter. *Does this sound like it’s going to be an interesting series?* Scandalous sex, alcohol, divorce, lawsuits, hypocrisy! People say “Bible’s not relevant.” what Bible you are reading!?

Paul knows this church needs more than just some pointers on how to live as Christians. They need an overhaul of their whole system of thinking. That’s the power of this letter. For 16 chapters Paul is going to do something much deeper than correct misguided behaviors. He’s going to hold up the gospel as the new lens they are to look at their world through. And that lens...that’s the secret sauce that makes 1

Corinthians SO, SO valuable. When I talk about seeing the world through a gospel lens do you know what I mean?

Let me explain it this way: You guys ever heard of beer goggles? Where someone drinks too much beer and it distorts their ability to make good decisions? And so they make decisions that seem good while they are intoxicated but then after they sober up they are like...that was a bad decision? That’s actually a good illustration for how sin distorts the way we see all of life. We are all born with sin goggles. These goggles make things that are bad for us seem really good for us. And usually we get a sober moment when those things don’t deliver like we thought they would. Ex: if I can just be in a relationship I’ll be secure. But then your last 3 relationships left you in a mess. So here’s what happens: Life is us searching and searching for what will satisfy us but the problem is the whole time we are looking through a distorted lens.

That’s why we need this letter. Because in it Paul is going to show us the flaw in our sin goggles...so to speak...and he’s going to show us the joy of finally seeing the world clearly...as God designed us all along to see it. Because I’ve told you before if you could just see as God sees then you’d live as God says. Because it’s the best way to live!

That’s what the church was supposed to do for the world. To be this beacon of hope and true light in a world distorted by darkness. But in the church we are going to read about the darkness had crept back in and was

distorting and destroying who God had designed them to be. The result was Pride, Greed, Lust, Confusion, Anger, and Fear....things that pit brothers and sisters against one another and will tear a church apart from within. And Paul is saying what you need is the clarifying power of the gospel that shows you the world God designed for you and then it restores relationships and empowers unity, peace, courage, love, and mission for you personally and for the church.

Basically Paul is saying to this church why would you settle for your old way of life!? TAKE YOUR GOGGLES OFF!! Christ offers you something so much better HERE and NOW. In marriage, in work, in friendships, in sex, in conflict, in depression, in life purpose, in everything Paul is going to say look at who you are in Christ!

That's why we are calling this series the Living Gospel. Because the gospel was never meant to be just the door to Christianity. The gospel is the announcement of God's love for you and that love is going to become the power source for your life. And there is great freedom in that! In fact lets get into the introduction to the book. I want you to see the pattern of God acting on our behalf emerge. Paul has big things to say, but he starts with how God & his love worked on them. Watch

[1] Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,

Paul begins by saying his calling as an apostle is one given by God. God called him. In fact the criteria for being an apostle was that you had personal interaction with Jesus and for Paul that meant when he was walking on the road to Damascus Jesus himself came down into the road in a light so bright it blinded Paul & sent him flat on his face and he was like Paul you better chill out. Paul didn't find Jesus, Jesus found him. From his salvation to his occupation Paul gives God the credit for his life.

Then he drops this name Sosthenes. Who was one of their own...who used to be a ruler of the synagogue if you go look in Acts 18. But then church history tells us he became a Christian when Paul planted this church. And Paul is saying hey not just me writing this letter but that guy that was a religious leader...God saved him too...And we who are two miracles of God's power...that's who is writing to you.

[2] To the church of God that is in Corinth,

Whose church? – Church of God. God's church not just the church in Corinth. But God's church. God's people. You belong to someone else when you become a Christian. And that dictates everything about how you see your life. I've told some of you about a really bad church breakup I witnessed and it all started with person after person standing up saying "I want this MY way in MY church." Problem was, it wasn't their church. Never was.

To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Sanctified in Christ Jesus – That means made holy. You didn't make yourself holy; you were made holy by Jesus. And when that happens you are now called a Saint. A holy one. Are the Corinthians living like that right now? NOPE! BUT, he doesn't start with rebuke does he? No. He reminds them of who they are. Because God is not after behavior modification. He's after the heart. And so Paul is grounding everything in what God has done for them in Christ and who that made them. SO SO BIG.

Because some of you in high school are feeling the pressure to live like your classmates live. To live like the Corinthians. Where sex & drugs are no big deal and where what matters most is how many people like you. And God says WAIT a second...don't settle for that garbage. You are mine! And at MY right hand Psalm 16 there is fullness of joy and pleasure forevermore. What your friends have is an illusion. I've got the real thing. You just can't see it because you aren't looking through God's eyes. You still have your sin goggles on. And they got you thinking that garbage is awesome. And Paul is saying the way to take them off is to start by remembering who you are in Christ!

[3] Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Where does Grace & Peace come from? From God.

[4] I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus,

Why do I thank God for you? Because of the grace of God...GIVEN to you in Christ Jesus. Not the grace of God earned by your religious efforts. The gospel is a message about a GIFT for you. Salvation...freedom from your sin that has enslaved you. That's a gift to you.

[5] that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge—

Corinthians were boasting about how smart they were & how much knowledge they had...But where did it come from? You were enriched. Came from God.

[6] even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed among you—

The testimony about Christ is the gospel and the way it is confirmed is by its visible effects in their lives. Paul is giving them hope that the gospel has born fruit among them. Yes there are problems but there is hope. The Spirit is alive and working!

[7] so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Gift – specifically here talking about *charismati* or grace-gift. We will translate that as the phrase “spiritual gift” this series. And that was a source of pride for them. And Paul is saying...where did your gift come from! You didn't conjure it up. God gave it to you. And you aren't lacking ANYTHING!

That's so huge. I think about our church...we are only 1.5 years old and I'm like man there is so much we need and then I see that...we have all we need! That gives us freedom to carry out our mission! Yes I hope God gives us a building...but the church doesn't need that to be the church! Buildings are just tools to help the church accomplish its mission. We have everything we need right here among us and because God gives us these gifts we know they are really good for us! I hope during this series some of you realize how God has gifted you because as you begin to use your gift...man that is going to cause the rest of us to see more of the grace of God! Can't wait.

[8] who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Who will sustain you? Will it be your strength? No. Even when you sin, when you mess up...Jesus will hold on to you. And when "the day" comes where God judges the world...he will declare you guiltless because you are in Christ. Not because you've earned it...but because he put your guilty verdict on Christ so that you could go free. If it were up to you, you would keep right on messing it up and re-earning that guilty verdict. In this life...we will never see completely clearly. Sin will always tug at us and we'll let the old self slip back in and distort our world. But God will not judge us on that. He will declare us guiltless...because we are covered by Christ. Ya'll that is incredible. Then he finishes with...

[9] God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

You are not faithful. I know. Some of you are still feeling the effects of your sin where you weren't faithful to God and maybe to someone else. When we sing what a beautiful name it should drop you to your knees saying thank God you are faithful even when I'm not. I saw a pastor Friday whose sin destroyed the church my family went to after that other breakup and I couldn't help but look at him Friday and think...God is faithful. Even when you really wreck your life the arms of the father are still open to you.

What is he saying in this introduction? He's showing us how to see the world through the lens of the gospel. To this church full of problems he begins by showing them the freeing power of the gospel. It's the gospel lens. The rest of the letter is putting that lens on specific situations. **Here are 3 pillars of a gospel worldview.** These come out in these first 9 verses and I believe create the gospel lens that can help you see where you've bought a lie about how the world works. And begin to reject the enemy's narrative and replace it with a gospel narrative. Here we go:

1. God will finish what he started in you

Notice how Paul covers all three tenses in these first 9 verses? **Past:** You *were* sanctified (2). The grace of God *was* given to us (4). Testimony of Christ *was* confirmed in you (6). **Present:** you are not lacking in any spiritual gift (7).

Future: He *will* sustain you to the end (8) and you *will be* guiltless (8).

Your salvation was always God's doing. That's why there is no room for pride in your life. Because the most important thing about you, your salvation...God did it all. While we were still sinners Christ died for us. American Theologian Harry Ironside "What was my part in the salvation process? My part was sinning." That's why I keep preaching the gospel to my kids. They keep sinning. I'm like you are doing your part. You clearly need Jesus. Sometimes Courtney preaches at em. Loudly.

There is this song we sing called come thou fount. It's an old hymn that uses rich, good language to describe the story of every Christian. One line goes like this "oh to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be. Let thy goodness like a fetter (that's a prisoner's chain) bind my wandering heart to thee. Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God..." When I was wandering Jesus came after me. And the same Christ that found me is the one that will not let me go. He's still got me and is still making me more into his image.

Here's where that gives hope: Some of you Christians need to know God has not forgotten about you and he is not done using you for his glory. 1 Cor 10.31 will be an anchor verse for us and it says do whatever you do to the glory of God. And I believe God wants to use you in mighty ways for his glory in your day. We say we want your greatest days of

faith to be these days here at Mercy because God is not done with you. I especially mean that for you in here over 50. You are God's grace to our church but there is a danger for you to sit back and reminisce about the glory days. No. God is not done with you. You'll have all of eternity to rest. You don't retire from Jesus, the church, or God's mission. Instead I believe God stretches your faith even more in this season of life as you lead by example through how you take leaps of faith still today knowing that you are still a work in progress.

Listen one other thing: some of you are being pursued by God right now. You aren't Christian yet but it seems like so many things keep coming together to point you to Jesus. *Girl a couple weeks ago - Saturday tells her friend "I feel like I need to know God." Sunday - we start a series called "knowing God." Hmmmmm*

And that's some of you right now. I'll tell you what God is doing: he's bringing you to himself. There is a great story from C.S. Lewis in *The Horse and His Boy*. In their journey to Narnia they were pursued by a lion. This lion haunts them, terrorizes them, and even wounds them at times. But later, they learn it was Aslan who chased them, frightened them, who wounded them. The one they feared and didn't understand became the one they loved. Some of you don't understand why all of these things are happening in your life and I'm here to say God is calling you! He's saying stop running and surrender your life to him!

That leads right into the second pillar of a gospel worldview

2. The sufficiency of Christ gives peace to your soul

Listen I cannot say this one enough. There is a reason we come back to the gospel all the time here at Mercy. Because it is there at the cross where freedom from your sin and peace for your soul both reside. Said this a couple weeks ago: When you finally own up to the fact that you are a sinner who disobeyed God time and again, then you are ready to receive his mercy. The gospel is the announcement that hopeless sinners found salvation when they called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is, when we believed that Christ's death was a substitute for our own death and that we are now free from the penalty of sin. We have new life! And we also have a new identity...verse 2 again...

To those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

Saints! See listen the main way the enemy is going to attack you is to challenge that identity as a Saint. That's why Paul starts there. Because the enemy is going to try and convince you that you either aren't worthy of the title of "saint" or that being a saint means you are better than all the other sinners out there. He will use your failures to tear you down and your successes to falsely build you up. And that's why Paul starts with your identity. Don't trust your feelings...trust who God says you are. A Saint! Regardless of

how you feel today, trust the word of God and obey it because it is far more sure than your feelings today. And right there...listen when the word of God becomes more sure to you than your feelings...that's when the goggles start to come off and the peace of Christ starts to nourish your soul. When you can say "I know what the gospel says about me and I'm choosing to believe it instead of what I feel right now." I feel like a failure but in Christ I'm loved and approved. When that desire to look at porn starts to kick in you are able to say, "I trust who Christ says I am. That true satisfaction is in him and not in quick fix images that corrode my soul." When the urge to cheat to get ahead at work because everybody else does it so it's no big deal "I trust in who Christ says I AM. Satisfaction is in him not in the corporate ladder." Some of you God is going to give great career success to and you will be industry leaders and I hope 1 Cor 10.31 will be your anthem. Success is good and God gives it to you, but there isn't a thing you build that will last into eternity. I hope by the end of this series you are able to say "Christ is better" over every nook and cranny of your life.

Third pillar of a gospel worldview

3. We offer Christ to our brothers and sisters

Ok this is simple but let me explain because more than ever before I am experiencing this in my own life. Seriously God has used the Mercy Family to awaken me to this truth. Every. Single. Time. I interact with another human. Every phone call, every meal, every pick up basketball game,

every 3 minute casual catching up conversation...Every time...I have the joy of Christ to offer to you.

[9] God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

The “fellowship” we are in is built on and powered by the Son of God Jesus Christ. That’s what binds us together. It’s the mercy & freedom we have each experienced in Christ.

Now, if I don’t believe pillar #2 that Jesus is enough, then I will probably need to use you to satisfy my own need for importance and worth. But if I believe I have all I need in Christ...well then I am free to give the love of Christ to you. This is what people who have experienced the grace of Christ do. And Paul is going to say that this is the biggest problem in the church. Husbands & Wives, friends, families having all these disagreements BECAUSE they keep choosing self-preservation instead of self-sacrifice. Their problem was a grace problem. Their racism, their pride, their greed...was all symptoms of a gospel drought in the church. The Corinthians had simply forgotten grace! My question is...have you? When you give of yourself to others, when you serve others, is it a duty or a delight?

Ya’ll this is hard for me because I sat down and evaluated myself and asked...are the people who interact with me day in and day out, AND the people I only meet once, are they encountering the love of Christ through this interaction?

Now before you think, “that’s an impossible standard” you are right. Why I go back to pillar 1 & 2. I’m not perfect, but Christ is sufficient. Here’s what that means: sometimes you are going to fail to follow Christ. You are going to sin and the enemy would want you to think that makes you unworthy of God’s love. And God says no, Christ is sufficient. And you can find forgiveness and freedom instead of that sin defining your life. That’s the power of the gospel. And listen...sometime somebody is going to sin against you. And this is huge: the only hope you have for forgiving them is to lean your weight back into the gospel. That Christ loved you even when you were unlovable. The power to forgive those who hurt you is in Christ who forgave you!

Closing

This series I am praying many of you will be challenged like never before to apply the gospel. I’m praying God will show you where your view of the world has been distorted by Sin and that realization will drive you back deeper into the gospel. Some of you are going to step further into the gifts God has given you and begin to really use them. And some of you who are running from God need to listen over these next few weeks. Listen with an open heart and mind to God talk about every aspect of your life. And you decide what you are going to do with him.

Pray