



Articles and Sermons :: The Word of Jesus

The Word of Jesus - posted by wayneman (), on: 2009/5/1 22:29

Transcript of a message I shared at a meeting of Reformer's Unanimous, a Bible-based addiction recovery program.

THE WORD OF JESUS

Text: Mark 4:2-20 The Parable of the Sower

The seed is the Word of God. The soil is us in our unregenerate state. Soil is lifeless and cannot by its own activity become anything other than dirt. But when a seed is planted and watered then dirt is transformed and organized into a living thing. It becomes something other than dirt. The Lord's plan of salvation is not to reform dirt but to transform it into something completely new.

Jesus didn't come to improve humanity's behavior by teaching ethics; he came to create a new humanity. Regeneration isn't a change of the old life, it's the beginning of a new life. The gospel doesn't stir up the latent goodness in us, it doesn't appeal to our higher nature; we don't have one. We're in complete darkness until the word of God comes from outside and engrafts a new nature in us. That's when the light goes on.

The psalmist says, "The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, seek God. They are all gone aside, they are together become filthy: There is none righteous, & no, & not one: & There is none that understandeth, & there is none that seeketh after God. & Their throat is an open sepulchre; & with their tongues they have used deceit; & the poison of asps is under their lips: & Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: & Their feet are swift to shed blood: & Destruction and misery are in their ways: & And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Calvin didn't invent total depravity, Adam did. When he sinned he died spiritually and we all died with him. When we were unregenerate, before the word of God came to us, we weren't just morally deficient; we were dead.

There was an infinite gulf between us and our Creator and that's why by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Only God Himself could cross over this infinite gulf and reconcile sinners to himself. God can only be known by revelation. This is where religion fails. This is where liberal theology falls down. It assumes that man is so brilliant he doesn't need revelation. He can figure out the divine mysteries on his own. Schleiermacher, the father of liberal theology, said we can reconcile ourselves to God by cultivating beautiful sentiments. That's not what the law of Moses tells us. The law is a voice crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord. And that's what the law does; it goes out ahead of the gospel, preparing the way. The law is like a tiller that prepares the ground to receive the seed.

The law says to us, "You can't save yourself. Your life is an abomination, your heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, your beautiful sentiments are unholy lusts, your religion is a bad joke, your righteousness is as filthy rags. You need a savior. Only the miracle of the New Birth can make a sinner a saint. Only the power that made the universe can make a Christian." Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." And the new birth happens when the word of God is heard and believed.

Peter says, "We are begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God." 1 Pet. 1:23-25

James says, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth." 1:18 And tells us to "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." 1:21

Paul says, "Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God."

Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life." John 5:24 "the words that I speak unto you, are spirit, and are life." 6:63 "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you." 15:3 "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." 17:17

To the Pharisees he said, "Ye have not his word abiding in you, ye have not the love of God in you, ye have no life in yo

u, because my word hath no place in you." He said, "Why do ye not understand my speech? because ye cannot hear my word."

The pharisees were "they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts." So the pharisees didn't receive the word of God even for a minute. But there were some who received the word with joy, but they were on shallow soil so they had a shallow experience, hung around for a while and then withered away. From this we learn that there is a pre-natal phase to the new birth. The divine nature is implanted in us even before we're saved. If not we wouldn't be capable of taking a single step toward God.

If we accept the doctrine of eternal security, the perseverance of the saints, which we must, not only because we're on Baptist turf, but because Jesus said, "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand." And Paul said to the Phillipians, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform until the day of Jesus Christ:" Not "might perform," "will perform."

So, the seed that began to grow but withered or was choked by thorns is not people who were born again and then lost their salvation. It's people who received the seed, and divine life began to grow in them but never came to fruition. This awakening is what theologians call prevenient grace, or irresistible grace. God began a work in us before we were saved. If not we wouldn't have been capable of faith or repentance or even thinking a right thought about God.

The natural things speak of the invisible. The natural process of childbirth tells us something about the new birth. A baby is alive for nine months before he is born. He has eyes but sees not, ears but hears not, he has lungs but doesn't breathe, he has brainwaves but doesn't know anything. It's only when he's born into the world that life as we know it really begins.

So we learn from the parable of the sower prevenient grace. That means we get no credit for our salvation. We didn't become Christians because we weighed the pros and cons and made a wise choice. We became Christians because the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Salvation, sanctification, all things pertaining to life and godliness are nothing but the grace of God from beginning to end.

If the Bible tells us something once, it's important. If it tells us something 2 or 3 times, that's the Lord's way of saying, "Don't miss this." Romans 5:15-19 tells us 5 times in 5 different ways that sin came into the world through Adam and righteousness came through Jesus. When the Bible tells us the same thing 5 times in 5 consecutive sentences that's a flashing red light saying, "Don't miss this! Before you proceed further, you must understand this!" As by one man sin entered the world, so by one man grace abounded to many.

The NT tells us over 200 times in 200 different ways that we are "in Christ" and He "in us." It must be important.

Rom 8:1 There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus,
2 Cor. 5:17 If any man be in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away; behold, all things become new.
1Cr 15:22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

If we do a word study of the phrases "in Christ" "in Him" "by" "through" "with" and "together with" Christ, we find that in Christ is salvation, justification, redemption, the love of God, no condemnation, freedom from the law of sin and death, unity, sanctification, wisdom, righteousness, eternal life, the new creation, the eternal purpose, all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, grace, truth, hope, acceptance, triumph, perseverance, consolation, preservation, rejoicing and faith which worketh by love. All things pertaining to life and godliness are in Christ. The Christian life is Christ plus nothing, no additives required, because in him are all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

If we could sum up the Christian life in four words it would be "not I but Christ." In three words, "Christ in you." There is only one man who ever lived the Christian life and that's Jesus Himself. I don't say that only one man has lived the Christian life perfectly; no, there is only one Man has lived the Christian life, period, and He's lived it millions of times in millions of people. Paul, Peter, James, Augustine, Luther, Bunyan, Spurgeon, Joe, Dee, Ruth Ann. It's God who worketh in us both to will and to do. If we do good works, it's Christ working in us. If we have victory over the enemy, it's Christ victorious in us. If we know the truth, it's Christ knowing in us. The entirety of the Christian life is "Christ in you, the hope of glory; Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working; &

which worketh in me mightily."

When we stand before the Lord all our works will be tried by fire--gold, silver, precious stones, wood hay and stubble. The organic material, that is, any religious works arising from human effort, human ingenuity, will go up in flames--that which is born of flesh is flesh--whatever was wrought in us by Christ--the gold, silver and precious stones--will remain. That which is born of Spirit is Spirit, and whatever is born of Spirit is eternal. You've heard the old hymn, "Just one life 'twill soon be past and only what's done for God will last." No. Anything we do for God will go up in flames. Only what's done by Christ through us will last.

Dr. Tozer used to talk about religious Adam. When we're saved and sanctified, the sinful flesh becomes the religious flesh. Religious Adam wants to be a bigshot in the kingdom of God, wants to be renowned for his godliness, admired for his humility. He wants to establish a righteousness of his own so he doesn't have to submit to the righteousness of God. This is why so the doctrine of Election is controversial even though it's taught so clearly in the Bible. The old man, the adamic ego doesn't like this business of being saved by grace through faith, it mortifies human pride get on our knees and say, "God have mercy on me, a sinner." You know the guy who stands in the synagogue and says, "Lord I thank thee, that I am not like this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." That's religious Adam. There's a movement out there known as the Manifest Sons of God, or the Manchild doctrine, which teaches that God is raising up an end-time army of apostolic supermen who will be untainted by the world the flesh and the devil, immune to disease, impervious to bullets, and they'll go around the world filling stadiums, saving millions, performing signs and wonders and miracles, healing the sick raising the dead, moving mountains. That's religious Adam on steroids. Nothing could be more carnal than this lust for spiritual superstardom. Here's a biblical response to "manifest sons of God."

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing...

Prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, knowledge will fade away. But love abides forever because God is love. The things that impress men the most--tongues, prophecy, miracles, big crowds, big numbers--are temporal, they won't carry over into eternity. But the fruit of the Spirit - love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, & temperance - will remain because those are eternal qualities of Jesus Himself, and they can only be produced in us by the Son of God indwelling us.

A friend and I used to go down to a halfway house every Saturday night and have a Bible study with guys coming out of state prison, mostly on drug charges. A lot of guys get saved in prison, and it's not easy being a Christian in prison, but it's even harder when they get out. Their PO's make them wear a tether and go right back to their old neighborhoods. Or they send them to halfway or three-quarter houses which are all in druggie neighborhoods, so I was always harping on victory over sin. "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee." When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness He quoted scripture and that's what we have to do. We gave them a list of Bible verses to memorize for specific temptations. Well, this message tonight was going to be another harangue on victory over sin until I had a revelation: I finally noticed that that term doesn't appear in the Bible and I think I know why. It's a bad concept, and that helps explain why all my Bible knowledge didn't prevent me from being knocked out of the ring for ten years.

I always thought of the Christian life in terms of a boxing match: The New Man vs. The Old Man. Sometimes the new man is ahead on points, but sometimes the old man has him against the ropes. But how can that be? The Bible tells us the old man is dead. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." It doesn't say fight the old man it says "put off the old man." Throw him out of the ring!

It may seem, in our experience, that the old man is alive and well, but instead of interpreting the Bible in light of experience, let's do it the other way around. Here's what the Bible says, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law." So it's not a daily battle between the old man and new man, with one guy winning this round 10-9, and the other guy winning that round 10-8. It's an either/or proposition. Either we're walking in the Spirit and winning every round 10-0 because the old man isn't even in the ring, or we're walking in the flesh and we

're battling the old man every day, and sometimes we're on the ropes and sometimes he's on the ropes but either way we're living in Romans 7, struggling with sin instead of being free from sin

Romans 7 doesn't describe the unregenerate man. It describes the Christian who's trying to live the Christian life in his own strength and losing. "For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members."

In the 13th century the Archbishop of Canterbury divided the Bible into chapters and verses. Good idea, but he's always putting the chapter breaks in the wrong places. The most notorious example is Isaiah 53 where he puts a chapter break right in the middle of the suffering servant prophecy. Well, here in Romans he puts the chapter break in the wrong place again, so we'll ignore it and read straight through.

"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord; So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death; For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

So Paul doesn't end on the defeatist note, "Oh wretched man that I am!" The chapter break after verse 25 creates the impression that Paul has finished his train of thought and settled for a compromise: "with the mind I'll serve the law of God and with the flesh I'll give the devil his due." No he ends on a note of rejoicing that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." This isn't about justification. Romans 5 is about justification and Christ's righteousness being imputed to us, the Just for the unjust. Romans 8 is about Christian living; it's about sanctification.

Jesus didn't die to save us from hell; he came to save His people from their sins. Hell is a consequence of sin. We're saved by Christ's righteousness being imputed to us and our own performance can't add or subtract from that. But the Father didn't just predestinate us to salvation, he predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son. Rom. 8:29 The Son of God did not come down from heaven, put on human flesh, suffer, die, rise again, ascend to heaven and sit down at the right hand of the Father just to give us a second-rate salvation that delivers us from the legal consequences of sin but leaves us in bondage to the power of sin. He came to save us from our sins, set us free from sin. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. If the Son shall make you free ye shall be free indeed. Not free in theory, free indeed.

"Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." v4

The righteousness that Christ imputes to us is not just theoretical, He lives His righteousness through us so we can walk in newness of life.

"For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." v14

John says, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." He also says, "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him." 3:6 Theologians have used an ocean of ink trying to explain this paradox and Luther liked the first verse and Wesley liked the second verse. But John doesn't present it as a paradox, something requiring an explanation. He seems to take for granted that his readers understand the dual nature. We have a sinful nature, but if we abide in Him who cannot sin, we don't sin. In verse 9 he says, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God." 3:9 (There's that word again: "seed." The seed is "that which we have heard from the beginning...the word of life" 1:1-3)

If we're abiding in Christ and his words abide in us, if we're walking in the new birth, we're not sinning; we're under grace and sin shall not have dominion over us. One night I went to a prayer meeting at which God seemed to show up; we sensed the manifest presence of God. The next day I had this sense of tranquility, I was preoccupied with Jesus, spent every spare minute in prayer and reading the Scripture. Had no impure thoughts, I was gracious to everyone, and as I got re

ady for bed I realized I'd gone the whole day without sinning. Now, I'm not bragging. It was only one day out of the 15,000 or so that I've lived on earth, and the next day was a different story. But I have found that when I'm preoccupied with Christ I'm not sinning; and when I'm focused on my own performance I'm back in Romans 7. I'm holding to a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. The form of godliness is me trying to live the Christian life in my own strength. The power of godliness is Jesus Himself, living His life through me.

Paul warned us that in the last days perilous times would come, because, among other things, men will be holding to a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. I would suggest that the first rule of spiritual discernment is: if it's centered on Jesus it's of God, if it's centered on man it's counterfeit. Pastor Traxler preaches what's called a christocentric theology. Christ-centered. Whatever the topic it always comes back to Jesus. Paul told the Corinthians "I was determined to know nothing among you but Christ and Him crucified." Because Jesus said, "I, if I be lifted up will draw all men unto Me." "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." And that's what we're supposed to do in all our preaching and testifying and witnessing: lift up Jesus so people can look to Him and be saved.

90% of what passes for gospel preaching today is just law. It's a man-centered gospel. How to be a better husband, father and brother, how to be a woman of God, how to be a better witness, how to improve your serve, seven steps to personal revival, three steps to victory over sin, the purpose-driven life. This kind of preaching draws our eyes off of Jesus and onto ourselves. It's like telling Peter "Never mind Jesus, focus on the wind and the waves." But as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus, he was able to do the humanly impossible: walk on water. As long as I have my eyes on Jesus, I find myself doing the humanly impossible: walking in newness of life.

The best way I know to stay focused on Jesus is to stay in the Word, because the Bible always points us to Jesus. I'd like to close with a passage from Colossians chapter 1 because it's an excellent example of how the Scriptures lift up Jesus and focus our vision on Him.

9‭ ‬For this cause we also,‭ ‬since the day we heard it,‭ ‬do not cease to pray for you,‭ ‬and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding‭; ‬10‭ ‬That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing,‭ ‬being fruitful in every good work,‭ ‬and increasing in the knowledge of God‭; ‬11‭ ‬Strengthened with all might,‭ ‬according to his glorious power,‭ ‬unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness‭;
12‭ ‬Giving thanks unto the Father,‭ ‬which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:‭ ‬13‭ ‬Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness,‭ ‬and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:‭ ‬14‭ ‬In whom we have redemption through his blood,‭ ‬even the forgiveness of sins:‭ ‬15‭ ‬Who is the image of the invisible God,‭ ‬the firstborn of every creature:‭ ‬16‭ ‬For by him were all things created,‭ ‬that are in heaven,‭ ‬and that are in earth,‭ ‬visible and invisible,‭ ‬whether they be thrones,‭ ‬or dominions,‭ ‬or principalities,‭ ‬or powers:‭ ‬all things were created by him,‭ ‬and for him:‭ ‬17‭ ‬And he is before all things,‭ ‬and by him all things consist.‭ ‬18‭ ‬And he is the head of the body,‭ ‬the church:‭ ‬who is the beginning,‭ ‬the firstborn from the dead‭; ‬that in all things he might have the preeminence