

# The Gospel-Driven Church

By Todd Pruitt

In September we began a series of messages called “The Gospel-Driven Church.” It is a part of an emphasis that I hope will be refreshing and challenging for Metro East. Much of it is the fruit of what the Lord was doing in my heart during the strategic ministry planning process. Along with reading the report from the SMPT many of you are reading John Ensor’s book The Great Work of the Gospel with us. The intention is not to present to you a new model for ministry or “doing church.” This is not a program or a campaign. It is, rather, a reminder and a call for realignment.

Either through neglect or outright denial the church is in danger of losing her most valued treasure – The Gospel. This rarely happens because of malice. We are just prone to be carried away by fads. It seems this is especially true for pastors. In a day when people show more loyalty to a grocery store than their church, pastors are under increasing pressure to “liven things up” or provide something “new and exciting.” This, however, is a dangerous tendency because it leads very often to being carried away by whatever happens to be fashionable at the time. Since the Gospel has never been fashionable the results are predictable. Rather than being central, the Gospel becomes neglected.

The Gospel is often narrowed to a small corner of the Christian experience. It is treated as something we do when we “get saved” or as simply an outline to memorize for evangelism. What is lost is the all encompassing reality that the Gospel holds over the entire life of the Christian individually and the church collectively.

To begin with, the Gospel is a message. It is the good news that Jesus died in the place of sinners and rose victorious from the dead. The Gospel is not something we do. It is an announcement of what God has already done in Christ. But the power of that message transforms people. It does not leave us as we are. It changes us. It changes our values, our loves, our attitudes, and actions. It effects how we serve. It makes us willing to sacrifice for the good of others. It makes us merciful instead of wrathful. It makes us forgiving instead of begrudging.

So, what do we mean when we talk about the church being “Gospel-Driven”?

## **1. The Gospel is the church’s chief message.**

Nothing we proclaim is more important than the Gospel. When pastors begin preaching moral lessons and life skills rather than the Gospel then there is a problem. The Bible is first and foremost the story of God’s redemptive program for His people. When “life lessons” crowd out that central message then the Gospel is being lost. Paul calls the Gospel “the matter of first importance” (I Cor. 15:3). To the church at Corinth he wrote that he had “decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”

(I Cor. 2:2). “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified...” (I Cor. 1:22-23).

## **2. The Gospel is the church’s primary theme for praise.**

The primary content of the praise of God’s Old Covenant people was their deliverance from Egypt. That deliverance was the supreme Old Covenant shadow of the redemption to come in Christ. It follows therefore that Christ and his redeeming work on the cross will be the primary theme of the church’s praise. This is why we sing so many songs about the cross. There is simply no greater theme for our praise.

## **3. The Gospel is the church’s highest motive for ministry.**

We reach out in love toward strangers, even enemies because that is what Christ did for us. We make a place at our table for others because Christ has made a place for us at His table. We seek to alleviate the suffering of the poor because Christ made himself poor for our sake.

## **4. The Gospel is the church’s supreme rationale for fellowship.**

Why should people who are so different begin to call each other “brother” and “sister”? Why is it that we should forgive when we are hurt? Why should we show mercy? Why should we be patient? Why should we pursue reconciliation? Did not Christ do all of these things for us through the cross? The Gospel breaks down all man-made barriers. The Gospel is the message of the ultimate act of reconciliation and fellowship.

I used to think it was old-fashioned and a bit silly to call each other “brother” and “sister”. But my attitude has changed. To use these words to describe each other is an announcement of the Gospel. It is an announcement that Christ has broken down the dividing wall between us and has turned strangers into family. So when we call each other “brother” and “sister” we are, in a roundabout way calling attention to the Gospel.

## **5. The Gospel is the church’s lasting power for mission.**

The Gospel is STILL the power of God unto salvation for all who believe (Rom 1:16). We do not go into the world with an insecure hope that people will desire what we are trying to offer them. We do not approach evangelism and missions the way a salesman seeks to sell a product. We go to the world with the confidence that the Gospel we proclaim carries the very power of God.

The Gospel does not need our help. It does not need to be dressed in modern garb. It does not need to be made more palatable for modern or post-modern tastes. It can stand on its own. It is *that* good. “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!...So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:15b, 17).