

Man-Centered Gospel Versus God-Centered Gospel

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I was driving in my car listening to so-called Christian radio and the deejay was quoting a modern translation of John 1:12. This deejay said, "But as many as accepted him, he gave the right to become the sons of God," and then the deejay commented, "Isn't it cool that Jesus came to this earth just for us and whenever we finally accept him, we will be a son of God," and he rambled on and on while I sat in my car fuming. It burned me up because today's modern gospel does not even resemble the biblical gospel of the Son of God.

Today's version of the gospel is man-centered. It revolves around man and his needs. The man-centered gospel of our day exists to make man happy and comfortable in this turbulent world and because of what God has already done for us, it is now up to us to accept Jesus or not. Salvation is in our hands. We can accept Jesus or reject him. We don't have to do it now, we can wait until we are good and ready to accept Jesus for he will always be there knocking on the door of our heart, standing there like with his hat in his hand, helplessly waiting for someone to come along and accept him.

But listen, friends, the real translation of that verse is not "as many as accepted him," but it reads this way, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." You don't accept Jesus, you receive him. You receive a revealed Christ. The real gospel is a God-centered gospel and it's centered around God and his glory not around selfish man. But today's gospel places the Son of God on man's level where you can accept him on your terms when you're good and ready.

Today's professing Christians accept only the Jesus he wants, the Savior part, so he can go to heaven and totally ignore the Lordship of Jesus Christ with all his claims and rights upon a follower of his. The two crimes modern evangelism has committed in your day and mine is that it has shrunken God down to man's size and taken salvation out of the hands of God and placed it in the hands of men where you can accept Jesus when you're good and ready and it's all up to you, you make yourself a Christian.

But let me read verse 13 again, it states, "Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." You see, friends, the God-centered

gospel declares that God is the author of salvation. It is God who gives the grace of saving faith and he can give it and withhold it and still be a just God. The God-centered gospel is where sinful man comes as a beggar to a King and he receives grace which he doesn't earn or deserve.

The title of my message this morning is "Man-Centered Gospel versus God-Centered Gospel" and I want us to see the vast distinctions between the false and the true because your very destiny hinges upon it. If you've swallowed the man-centered gospel which is heresy, you will surely die in your sins and drop into hell. Today's man-centered gospel tells you that Jesus came to die to make you happy and fix your problems. An encouraging word is that all you have to do is accept Jesus and you will be happy and go to heaven. Listen friends, Jesus did not hang naked and suffer and die on a bloody cross to make you happy but to make you holy. Jesus didn't save you so that you can remain in your filthy sins. Jesus came to save his people from their sins. The true gospel speaks of a cross in the life of a believer, that you pick up and carry as you follow a crucified Savior. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him keep his sins and gratify his flesh to his heart's content as long as he follows me." Did he say that? No, Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

All the followers of Christ must deny themselves. We must deny ourselves for Christ and his will and for his interest in the world. All followers of Christ must take up their cross and conform themselves to his example. Listen friend, the true gospel is a God-centered gospel which is for the glory of God, not the happiness of man. The true gospel is not an encouraging word to make your day a little less hectic and your life a little more comfortable. The true gospel has a cross in the center of it and that cross had the Savior's blood running down it for the remission of sin. The true gospel cost something. It cost God his beloved Son and it cost the Son his own blood and as followers of Christ we must get up on that cross and live crucified lives as we serve a King, King Jesus. I repeat, the God-centered gospel centers around God and his glory, not around man and his happiness. It is God who gives power to become the sons of God, not man. Salvation is not in the hands of man but in the hands of God. It is God who gives saving faith.

I wonder in how many churches today are sitting as members of their church and who give their time and money to the church, they are hard working, honest and decent people but they know nothing about the real gospel because they've never heard it before. All they have heard is this man-centered perversion of it and they've listened to it year after year and become gospel hardened. They swallowed it hook, line and sinker and they are sunk. Sunk in the mire of their sins; sunk in the dead profession of faith that will surely send them to hell. They have never been awakened to their lost condition. They've never been convicted of sin by the Spirit of God and they've never been truly converted through saving grace in a supernatural act which is regeneration. The power that is spoken of in John 1:12, "to them gave he power to become the sons of God," is the same power that resurrected Jesus. It's the same power because it takes a dead person who is dead in trespasses and sins and by that power, it gives them life. It puts a new disposition into a person, a disposition for holiness so one can live for the glory of God.

I look at the typical church in my country today and I weep. It breaks my heart. The deceived people who are church members break my heart. The pastors who are preaching a false gospel break my heart. And I look at the parents of this generation of teenagers, the parents who faithfully attend church every week, the parents who give their time and money to the church, the parents who have swallowed the false gospel of their generation and it breaks my heart. I sit with them and eat with them and speak with them and observe their lives and their conversations and they're no different than the world, the flesh and the devil, they are worldly people living for this world and hoping for the rapture.

The majority of church members today are completely indistinguishable from the pagan society in which they live. They watch the same tv shows; they feast on the world's entertainments; and they gratify their lusts and flesh just like the world only they do it under the name of Christianity. Their hearts have never been wrought upon by God through an awakening to their lost condition. They've never seen the utter wickedness of their own hearts. They sit upon a false foundation of self-righteousness and made a textual decision to follow Jesus. They've never experienced the new birth through regeneration; their sins have never been washed in the blood of the Lamb. They've never been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit of God and they know nothing of living lives of holiness unto the Lord. Yet the Bible declares in Hebrews, "Holiness without no one will see the Lord."

Rather, they swallowed a diluted gospel that flint out a little easier than the real one and that false gospel had no power to change them or transform their vile lives. They look good on the outside when they sit in their chosen seats in the sanctuary but inside, they are a bunch of rotten bones, they are dead in sin and unless they repent through saving faith in Christ, they will work and laugh and buy and sell and live and die in their sins and eventually drop down to hell.

I see their teenage children who grew up in the church under this false gospel and the teenagers are smart and they observe their parents in the home and there exists a double standard in the home where the parent says, "do as I say," rather than lead with a godly example of "do as I do." And the teenagers see right through their parents' hypocrisy and they think to themselves, "If this is what being a Christian is, I don't want any part of it." And as soon as they are old enough to leave home and get out on their own, they quit going to church altogether because they would rather be honest with themselves and admit they are not Christians rather than to pretend to be ones like their parents.

That, friends, is where the man-centered gospel of your day and mine has gotten us. It has damned its millions to hell. Hell fills up every hour with good church members who die in their sins and drop into a Christ-less eternity. People are screaming in hell this instant that they were a deacon at such-and-such a church, that they were good and faithful church members for 30-40 years. They gave their money and their time regularly but they didn't possess Christ savingly.

Listen to this message, friend: if you have swallowed the man-centered gospel, you had better re-examine your life in light of the true gospel. Have you ever been lost? How can you know you are saved if you've never been lost? Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost. Have you ever repented toward God? Jesus said, "Unless you repent, ye shall likewise perish." Have you ever been awakened to your lost condition apart from God? Have you ever been convicted of your sins? Listen, friend, you were born with a corrupt nature that hates all things holy and is against a sovereign God. Do you live a life of holiness to the Lord? Does the Spirit of God live within you? Have you ever been changed through the new birth? Do you live for the glory of God? Or do you live to please and serve yourself? Do you live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Or do you rule and reign on your heart or are you truly saved?

Allow me to read you John 1:13 again, "Which were born, not of blood," that means there is nothing in your blood but corruption through a ruined nature. Next, the text reads, "nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," in other words, you don't make yourself a Christian. You must be born from above. The text ends, "but of God." God is the one who performs a work of grace upon the heart in the act of regeneration. A true believer is born of the Spirit of God. Listen to Romans 9:16 which speaks of this very thing, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy." Are you an object of mercy, friend? Or are you a product of your own making? Do you desire holiness? Have you ever been changed? A true born again believer is a person who has experienced change. Can your loved ones testify to the fact that you are a changed individual? Or have you merely reformed some areas of your life so you can fit in better in Christian circles?

This is a serious matter. The man-centered gospel will tell you that you can become a Christian any time you want to and it's just as easy as accepting Jesus into your heart. That's all you have to do to be saved; just walk this aisle and make it public that you have come to Christ; just say this prayer and when you're done, if you really meant it, then you are saved.

I remember a big preacher who had great influence over his denomination. He used this illustration one Sunday: he held out his Bible and asked a staff minister to join him on the platform. The conversation went something like this: I have \$100 hidden in this Bible. Do you want it? Do you? All you have to do is take it when I hand it to you. Just accept it as my gift to you. Will you do it? He then handed the Bible to the staff minister and then he turned to his congregation and said, "Becoming a Christian is just like that, friends. It's just that easy, folks. All you have to do is want to become one and accept the free gift of eternal life." That big preacher made it awful easy to walk an aisle, to join his church and become a Christian but that's not true salvation, friend. That is the man-centered gospel of your day and mine and it makes false converts. People mistakenly believe themselves to be saved but they have no power from above to live the Christian life in obedience to a King so they live defeated lives. They stay in their sins and know nothing about a transformed life through a supernatural act of regeneration upon the heart through the new birth. Their sins have never been washed in the blood and they've never been born from above.

Does this describe you, friend? Are you born from above? Are you truly saved? Friend, if you are in doubt of your sin with Christ, I plead with you now to strive to enter at the strait gate. Press into the Kingdom with fervency and desperation. Storm heaven with a holy violence and beg God for mercy. Beg him for the grace in repentance and faith. Become a seeker of God and wrestle with him until you receive a blessing from on high.

There were many instances during the second Great Awakening in the 1800s where a person became awakened to their lost condition and did not find relief in a saving way until a month or two later. Some were awakened to their lost condition but carelessly did not press into the Kingdom savingly and they turned back from the strait gate. Don't let this happen to you, friend. Earnestly seek God to reveal his Son to you so you can receive a revealed Christ who has power to raise you from the dead and give you life from above.

George Whitfield, the great British evangelist, was a lost church member who lived dutifully for Christ and religion. He fasted and prayed regularly. He visited the sick and those in prison. He denied his body in a life of aestheticism but he was lost. One day his friend, Charles Wesley, handed him a book written by a Scotsman, Henry Scougal, and the book was entitled "The Life of God in the Soul of Man." As the youthful George Whitfield read that book, he realized that being a Christian was not just service to God but God actually living inside that person through the Holy Spirit. It was the life of God in the soul of man. George Whitfield put the book down and wrestled with God until he received a breakthrough with God and was truly born again and George Whitfield's message during the Great Awakening was one thing: ye must be born again. He knew the difference of living for God and religion and having God live through him through the new birth. Do you?

Today's man-centered gospel has a witness like this: Do you know about Jesus? "Yeah, I heard of him." Would you like to go to heaven? "I don't know. I guess." Did you know that Jesus died on a cross so that you could go to heaven? All you have to do to go to heaven and be with Jesus is just accept him into your heart and you can do that right now. "I can?" Sure, just repeat this prayer after me and you will be saved and on your way to heaven. "Really? Okay." And he repeats the prayer while he chews on his gum and accepts a Jesus he knows nothing about and he lives the same way he did before he met this gospel witness and when he dies he will die in his sins and go to hell but now he's just a gospel hardened lost person who will say to anyone else who ever offers him Christ that he already did that.

The God-centered gospel, on the other hand, speaks of ruin, redemption, repentance and regeneration. The God-centered gospel shows you that you are a law breaker and a rebel and you drink iniquity like it's water and you stand under the wrath of God unless you are reconciled back to a holy God through the blood of Jesus Christ. Let me illustrate this through the following story: There was an Englishman who often traveled to Scotland to hear great preaching. It was in the days of coaches and horses and it was quite a long journey to travel from central England to Scotland. And when he arrived, he found a little chapel and he went in to rest and hear the word of God. The man at the pulpit was

preaching out of Isaiah 6 about the glory of God and this preacher lifted up the majesty of God and the holiness of God and the attributes of God to such a degree that the traveling Englishman saw for the first time the awful majesty of a holy God. The next day, he visited another church and the minister in the pulpit was preaching on the utter depravity of the ruined nature and the deceitfulness of the human heart and as this man preached, he laid out all the blackness of sin and the darkness and blindness of a poor sinner without Christ. Lastly, this Englishman visited a white-haired preacher who spoke on the loveliness of Christ Jesus and this preacher drew out in detail such wonderful examples of Christ's appeal through being compared to a treasure in a field and a matchless pearl of great price. Christ was very appealing and very lovely to behold.

I like that story because it's a vivid portrait of the God-centered gospel. First you are shown the awful majesty of a holy God, high and lifted up, who dwells with the cherubim and whose name is holy. Next, you are shown your ruined nature and your own deceitful heart and that's a terrible thing, friend, when you see your heart for what it truly is and you see yourself without the props of your self-righteousness holding you up. So you see a holy God and your great need of being reconciled back to him. But how? Then the pearl of great price is shown in all his beauty and loveliness, the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed. How lovely he is. How desirable he is.

That's the true gospel, friend. You are not the author of your salvation, God is. Only God can give saving faith. Only the Spirit of God can awaken you to your lost condition and convict you of sin. Only the Spirit of God can wrought upon your heart in a true work of grace through regeneration. To be saved, you must exercise repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ, friend.

One of my favorite songs illustrates the dilemma of the poor sinner as he seeks a Savior. I will close my message with it. It is by C. J. Butler and it's called "A Sinner Like Me."

"I was once far away from the Savior,
And as vile as a sinner could be,
I wondered if Christ the Redeemer,
Would save a poor sinner like me.

"I wandered on in the darkness,
Not a ray of light could I see,
And the thought filled my heart with sadness,
There's no hope for a sinner like me.

"And then, in that dark, lonely hour,
A voice whispered sweetly to me,
Saying, Christ the Redeemer has power,
To save a poor sinner like me.

"I then fully trusted in Jesus,
And, Oh, what a joy came to me,

My heart was filled with his praises,
For saving a sinner like me.

“And when life’s journey is over,
And I the dear Savior shall see,
I’ll praise him forever and ever,
For saving a sinner like me.”