



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, JULY 11, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

July 12, 11-12:30

Baby Shower Open House in the Fellowship Hall

July 28, 6:00 p.m.

Stated Session Meeting

Aug. 3, 10:00 a.m.

The Lord's Supper Observed

Please note that the Session has suspended Wednesday and Sunday evening activities for the summer. They will resume, God willing, after Labor Day.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

We are in the middle of our Summer Sermon Series on *what is the gospel and why does it matter*. Over the past few weeks we've considered Jesus and his encounters with a number of individuals. One of the most outstanding things we've seen so far was the impact Jesus and His gospel made on the tax collector Zacchaeus.

Jesus had confronted Zacchaeus and opened Zacchaeus' eyes to see his sins for what they truly were. Zacchaeus becomes a Christian because of and through the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ to him.

Zacchaeus is an example of how powerfully the gospel works in every single person who becomes a Christian; the gospel completely transforms a sinner not only in his or her standing before God, but in his or her lifestyle as well.

This is a truth that is shunned by the cultural potentates of our day and misunderstood by

many in the church. While we are told by the culture that sinners are "born that way," culture tells us we need to love them by encouraging them in their lifestyle choices. Choices that the Bible says are destructive, perversions, or even signs of God's wrath upon a culture.

We must not let the culture tell us what to expect of people who claim to be Christians, rather we must look to the Bible. The Bible makes it clear that under the discipline and support of the local church, through the ministry of God's Spirit, by prayer, as well as personal striving against sin, a person - no matter how wicked - may truly see his or her lifestyle radically transformed because of Christ's gospel.

As we will see in our sermon text this Lord's Day, Ephesians 2:1-10, such a transformation is not optional or only for the "spiritual elites," but present in every person who is saved by grace through faith in Christ.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We have turned a corner in our study of the Catechism. This week we look at Question 39, which introduces a study of God's Law.

Q39. *What is the duty which God requireth of man?*

A39. The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

This question harkens back to WSC3 which states that the Scriptures "principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man." The first portion of the Catechism is dedicated to summarizing what we must believe about God, and now the Catechism turns its attention to what God requires of us.

People of all manner of stripes and spots get very upset when someone asserts that God "requires" things of us. Many of our contemporaries believe that the only thing God requires of us is that we be sincere about whatever it is we believe (unless it is "intolerant").

Other people get quite exercised when we start talking about God's requirements because they think that if God requires something of us, it compromises salvation by grace.

What does the Catechism mean when it speaks of God requiring obedience "to his revealed will?" The Catechism has already articulated that we are saved not through any efforts on of our own but solely on account of God's gracious covenant mercies shown to us through Christ the Redeemer. So is the Catechism contradicting itself?

Of course not; the Catechism is simply summarizing Scripture's teaching that we are absolutely saved by grace alone and contribute nothing to our salvation. But it also, and just as clearly, demonstrates that all whom God saves, He conforms into the image of His Son. God commands His people to live in obedience to His Law. Over the next several months, we'll look at the WSC summary of the Law.

Beware “Forrest Gump Spirituality”

Most of us have probably seen the 1994 Tom Hanks hit movie, *Forrest Gump* in which the titular character shares his experiences and reflections on life and society with various people on a Savannah park bench.

As the story goes on, Gump often shares with us little insights and maxims from his mother, which invariably begin, “Mama always said...”

For many who have been reared in a “pseudo-Christian Culture” such as the United States, we have a tendency to assume that the values and norms that we have known, lived under, and been taught are universal and transcendent truths and “Christian.”

Sadly, this is not always the case. For instance, you may have been told that it’s okay to tell a “little white lie” if it means not hurting someone’s feelings. God’s word, by contrast, tells us that God is a God of Truth, hates liars, and demands that His people love the truth so much that they forsake lying.

Many people who call themselves Christians live out a spirituality that consists simply of what they were taught by their parents and the traditions of their society. But is that where Christians are supposed to learn how to live as His people? Yet many in our society have a religion that consists of little more than “my mama always said...”

True Christianity is found and learned from God’s word, the Bible. The Bible teaches us that every culture is imperfect, riddled with sin, and doomed to pass

away. Because of this, God’s word confronts every culture with its sins, failings, and shortcomings as it calls the people of every culture to embrace Jesus Christ offered in the gospel and follow His commandments.

As Presbyterians, we must not be crippling our growth in grace by living a “Forrest Gump spirituality” that consists only of traditions and sentiments of the past. We must be constantly looking to Christ and His word to see if the traditions and values that we hold dear are actually from God or merely of man’s devising.

One of the problems that has continually dogged the Church is that as persecution dies down, the saints become increasingly comfortable with the culture and the church begins to increasingly resemble the culture. The only defense against this is a robust and disciplined love for God’s word, not simply the “idea” of God’s word, but the actual words, sentences, paragraphs, teachings and themes of the Scripture.

Do you love God’s Word? Is your Christianity, your piety founded upon a faithful study of the words of Christ? Do you make time to know your Bible? Or is your religion simply that of traditions and customs? A religion that resembles the culture is not a religion of the Christ who was crucified for offending the traditions and customs of the society in which He lived. We must each ask ourselves and evaluate is my religion based on “my mama always said” and “I always thought” or “God says in His word?”

Sermon Snapshot: “Where is Your Treasure?”

As we continued to consider the twin questions, “**what is the gospel**” and “**why does it matter**,” Sunday we looked at Mark 10:17-22 to help us understand those issues. There Jesus meets a deeply spiritual and religious man with a very profound and probing question.

The episode of the “Rich Young Ruler” is recorded in three of the Gospels (Mt. 19 Mk. 10, Lk.18), and forces us to reckon with both the free grace of God offered in Christ, but also the great cost of following Christ.

As we have noted many times, the Bible plainly teaches that a person contributes *nothing, nada, zilch* to his or her own salvation. In response to the man’s question in Mark 10, Jesus commands him to sell everything he has, give to the poor, and follow Him. Is Jesus offering a way of salvation that involves contribution? Was Jesus indicating that a rich person can attain to eternal life by giving away his or her wealth? Absolutely not; instead, Jesus was revealing to the man an area of his life that, in spite of all his own righteous deeds, was

still in rebellion against God. The man loved his money, his position more than he loved worshiping and following God. Can you imagine what “might have been” for this fellow? What a privilege to have been invited by Christ to become one of his intimates, one of the disciples during his earthly ministry! Yet the man went away sad because he realized that he would have to give up his comforts, his possessions in which he trusted.

Not many of us in Winona are rich, but we all must search our lives for areas in which we are holding out against God, for things that we treasure more than following after Christ.

Have you considered your own life and lifestyle this week? **Is your lifestyle lived in such a way that it proclaims that Christ is your dearest possession?** If you truly come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, He cannot help but become your highest joy. If you haven’t, consider the invitation and promise that Christ gives to all who see their need of Him to come and find rest, redemption, and grace.

What is the gospel?
& why does it matter?
Join us!
Starting June 1
Sundays @ 10:00 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church
302 Summit Street | Winona, Miss.