

THE MISSION

Part One: “Declaring the Gospel with Our Words”

Romans 10:14–17

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Scripture Reading

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:14–17, ESV).

Introduction

In my nearly two decades of ministry, I don’t know if I have ever experienced a time when there has been more external pressure pressed upon local churches.

There is pressure for the church to navigate the health pandemic, (but in a way that is neither irresponsible nor overreactive), to respond to cultural division (but in way that is not too political nor disconnected), to somehow get people’s attention (but without catering to consumerism falling in line with a culture of busyness).

I don’t know a time in my own ministry when so many voices in outside culture are telling the church what it needs to be. And for this reason, I think it is crucial for us to take to some time to remember who God has *called* us to be.

It is crucial from time to time to look into the words of Scripture and be reminded of the mission of the local church. It’s important to know our mission that that we can all find our place in the mission that we share together as a church.

This is the mission statement of our church family: *Redeemer Christian Church exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and display the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our neighbors and to the nations.*

Over the next four weeks, I want unpack what this mission statement means, how this mission flows from the word of God, and what this mission looks like in real life.

Today, we are going to talk about *“Declaring the Gospel with our Words.”*

1.) The Power of the Declared Gospel Word

I want to paint a picture of how important and powerful the idea of the proclaimed word is in Scripture. Where does this idea emerge?

As it turns out, the power of the declared word of God appears on the first page of the first book of the Bible: *“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God **said**, “Let there be light,” and there was light”* (Gen 1:1–3).

In the beginning, God created all things – every atom of every galaxy – through the power of his word.

Genesis then shows us that humans are God’s image-bearers that also possess creative capacity with our words (cf. Gen 1:26–28). A few animals can communicate on a lower level. But God’s image-bearers alone have the gift of language; the gift of words that create with power.

As Proverbs later tells us: *“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits”* (Prov 18:21).

When creation fell because of sin, our knowledge of God was fractured and broken and obscured. But God did not abandon creation. God initiated a rescue operation through his chosen people Israel (cf. Gen 12:2–3).

He redeemed this people from slavery, and he gave them his word (Ps 147:19–20). Israel was to declare the word of God to the nations, but instead fell into idolatry, exile, and judgment.

But though Israel failed, God’s word did not fail (cf. Rom 9:6). Through Israel, God sent the perfect word in the form of his son: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:1–5; 14)

Jesus Christ is the word of God who has dwelt among us.

Jesus spoke the word with authority, not like the scribes and Pharisee (cf. Matt 7:29). He fulfilled the purpose of Israel; he revealed God perfectly (cf. Heb 1:1–3). And he accomplished our redemption through his cross and resurrection.

After his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his apostles with the gospel word to make disciples of all nations by baptizing them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and the Holy Spirit and *teaching* them to observe all he commanded (cf. Matt 28:19–20). The church, as a redeemed people of all nations, now possesses the gospel word. And with that word, we are to bear witness to the kingdom of God.

The book of Acts is the story of the birth of the church. And, interestingly, Acts often describes the growth of the church as the growth of the *word*.

“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

“But the word of God increased and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

“So the word of the Lord continued to increase and prevail mightily” (Acts 19:20).

The word of God was central to the life of God’s people in the times of the New Testament. The word of God is to be central to the life of the people of God today.

This concept can be a struggle for some today. Our world is allergic to propositional truth, especially truth claims to carry authority or obligation.

We think everyone needs to have his or her own truth. Relative truth might work for issues like what is your favorite color. But relative truth does not work in issues of life or death. Letting a two-year old have his own truth when he wants to stick his finger in an electrical socket is not good idea.

Deception kills and enslaves. Only the truth sets us free. But the declared word is more than propositional truth to that we are to believe with our minds. It is transformational truth that we behold with our hearts.

Through the gospel word we see the face of Christ and are transformed, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:17–18). It gives new spiritual life. It transforms people.

The gospel word brings about a conversion of the soul. But, even more, the gospel word brings about a conversion of the imagination.

The word gives a framework for all of life; how we see our purpose, marriage, family, vocation in light of God’s work of creation and redemption.

The declared gospel word reveals to us the story of God that we are invited to participate in.

2.) The Practices of the Declared the Gospel Word

Now, when I say “practices,” I mean the ways that we declare the gospel word. The first and foremost way the gospel of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed with words is through the preaching ministry of the pulpit.

You can build the pulpit ministry of the church around a lot of things besides the gospel. You can build a pulpit around *felt-needs*. The pulpit can become a place where you hear biblical tips and good advice about relationships and money and other things of interest. The Bible does speak to those things, but it is possible to only speak about those things at the expense of failing to talk about Jesus!

The pulpit can be a place of *cheap grace*. While the Bible certainly provides words of comfort and encouragement and hope, if we *only* talk about those things, we run the risk of allowing people to stay enslaved to deadly sin and deception. The gospel word does comfort us, but it also confronts us.

The pulpit can be a place where the pastor talks about *how he alone is right*, and all other churches are wrong. This tends to create a church culture that is more like a theology club wherein the families live in separated silos of fear that are utterly disconnected from the world they are called to reach.

Today, there is a profound expectation for the pulpit to be *echo-chamber* of confirmation bias regarding our political views. This creates a church cultural of political punditry rather than prophetic engagement. The words of cable news will form you into a culture warrior. But the word of God will form you into a kingdom ambassador, and there is *a crucial difference*.

We do not come to God’s word for it to back up what we want to be true. We come to the word of God humbly, standing under its perfection and authority. We invite the Holy Spirit to correct and convict us for the way our culture or our own sin has blinded us.

That’s *why we stand* for the word when it is read. It is a way we acknowledge the authority of God’s word with our lives. When we stand in reverence before the word of God, it is one way we place the word of God in an entirely different category.

When we say Redeemer exists to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words, we are saying we want to be a people who are centered on the word. This is why we are committed to *expository preaching*; meaning we tend to walk through entire books of the Bible, line by line and verse by verse. This is why we are committed to *gospel-centered preaching*, when we open up Scripture we want you to see how all of God’s word points to God’s ultimate self-revelation in Jesus.

At Redeemer, we are committed to God’s word. We treasure God’s word. We will preach God’s word.

You may think that this should be a given for churches. And it should be. But it is not. American culture actually pushes very hard to make sure that the word of God is not central to the church. But that cultural cross-pressure is not unique to our age. Even in New Testament times, pastors needed to be reminded to make the word of God central in the life of the church.

When the Apostle Paul was in a Roman prison facing death, he wrote the letter of 2 Timothy to his disciple Timothy who was likely serving as the lead pastor of the church in Ephesus. In what is likely Paul's last letter he reminds Timothy: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry"* (2 Tim 3:16–4:5).

The word of God might not always give us what we want. But it does always give us what we need. And often, when we submit ourselves to God's word, we encounter unexpected blessing and encouragement from truth we would never have wanted for ourselves. We need the *"whole counsel"* of God's word (cf. Acts 20:27).

Without preaching through books of the Bible, the pulpit will miss parts of biblical truth. In the years that I have preached here, walking through books of the Bible, I've heard some interesting comments about this approach. I've had people who have gone to church their whole lives tell me they have never studied the Old Testament. I've heard people tell me that they had never read a book of the Bible all the way through. I even had a man once tell me he had never heard a sermon about repentance until he came here.

What happens when the word is not preached, is we tend to pick and choose parts of the Bible that can back up what we can to be true. And that is a dangerous place to be. That is why we must declare the gospel, but preaching the whole counsel of God's word.

But the statement "declare the gospel with our words" applies not only to me or to the men who preach from this pulpit. This call of our mission is something the whole congregation is to participate in. The church is the people of God, and we are to be a people of gospel proclamation.

As Paul entreats the Colossian church, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God"* (Col 3:16).

We declare the gospel with our words in worship, in the songs we sing. We declare the gospel with our words in gospel community, in our Bible discussions, in our conversations, and our prayers for one another. We declare the gospel with our words in all of our generational ministries: kids, youth, college, and senior adults.

We invite you to be a part of this.

In fact, did you know that our church has a really unique opportunity to reach hundreds of people in our city who don't yet know Jesus? In fact, we have a group of people who live in our do not yet believe show up here every week in this very building. They are not jaded yet. They are excited to know more about the Bible, and they will listen to you!

It's called Redeemer Kids! This is one simple, accessible way to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with your words week after week.

The way we are teaching our kids the gospel may be the most important and lasting part of what Redeemer is doing today.

Do you want to learn about the different books of the Bible and how they point to Jesus? We can help you with that. Serving in our Redeemer Kids ministry as a wonderful and accessible place to be equipped to declare the gospel and be given opportunity to declare the gospel.

We want you to know the Bible and gospel doctrine. And if you stick with us, we will teach you how to declare the gospel with your words. And we give you opportunities to declare the gospel with your words.

3.) The Purpose of the Declared Gospel Word

Jesus lived, died, and rose again. He is returning to make all things new. This gospel is absurd at a rational level. We believe in a man who has risen from the dead! But declaration of this gospel has consistently shone light into darkness and brought life out of death. The declared gospel word has changed lives. The declared gospel word has changed history.

Paul writes to the Roman church: *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'"* (Rom 1:16–17).

The purpose of the declared gospel word is salvation. The Holy Trinity conspired to author and accomplish our redemption and salvation. And now, we have been commissioned and entrusted with the sacred and awesome task of sharing that good news.

God works through the means of his people participating in his mission. This is from the text we read at the beginning of the sermon. It is Paul writing the Romans: *“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.”* (Romans 10:14–17, ESV)

It is not just my job alone to declare the gospel with my words. It is *our* job. If you are a Christian, you have been sent to declare the gospel of Jesus Christ with your words.

There is a famous saying attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary use words.” And there are two problems with that statement. Firstly, St. Francis never said that. Secondly, the Bible shows us that gospel declaration requires words.

The better quote would be this: preach the gospel at all times, and because it is *absolutely necessary*, use your words!

There are people who do not yet know Jesus. And you can go places that I cannot go.

For example, I literally cannot go to Pantex. But several of you can. And because the church has been sent into the world, the word of the gospel is unbound.

In the beginning of Acts, Jesus commands his disciples to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Not only are they to declare Jesus to their city and region, but even to the uttermost parts of the earth. It is beyond an audacious vision that would have seemed impossible at the time.

But do you know how the book of Acts ends? It ends with a man who used to be a violent persecutor of Christians declaring the gospel word in the capital city of the Roman Empire! Paul rolls up into the Imperial City, and even though he is under house arrest, Scripture says the word goes forth without hindrance (Acts 28:30).

What does this mean for us?

It means you need the discipline to truly know the gospel. Read your Bible. Get in a community group. Participate in our Equip trainings that we do. Prioritize weekly worship.

We live in a post-Christian age. People have been wounded by the church. People have big questions. And there is tons of confusion and deception out there.

Christians need to know their stuff. *You* need to know your stuff.

It means that you need the courage to share the gospel with your words. And I believe that this courage flows from a love of God, a love of neighbor, and a confidence that the gospel word is true.

It means that if you are a parent, committing and discipling your children. Bring them to church, pray with them at night, read the Bible to them at the dinner table.

Redeemer Christian Church, we have been given a mission. We have been given a privilege. Let us rise to the occasion and declare the gospel with our words!

AMEN.

Gospel Community Discussion Starters

- 1. Redeemer Christian Church exists to **declare** the gospel of Jesus Christ with our words and to **display** the gospel of Jesus Christ with our lives to our **neighbors** and to the **nations**. How are you called to declare the gospel with your words? What unique opportunities has God given you to share your faith?*
- 2. Read the Acts 6:7, 12:24, and 19:20. What was the role of the word of God in the life of the early church? What role should the word of God play in the life of the church today?*
- 3. Read Romans 10:14–17. How might your life fit in this passage? How has God uniquely positioned you to share the gospel with people who do not yet know Jesus?*
- 4. Who are people in your life who need to know the gospel of Jesus Christ? Who are the people you need to invite to church? Take some time to pray for people in your life by name who do not yet know Jesus, and make a plan to reach out to them.*