

# Evangelism: The message, the people, and the messenger

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 July 2019

Preacher: Carel Pienaar

[ 0 : 00 ] Good to be together this morning. If you don't know me, my name is Carl. If you're already here at one of the pastors at St. Peter's Church, it's the first time I've ever been at St. Mark's. And that's great to be with you as God's family, and it's wonderful to share God's Word with you.

And as you've heard, we're going to look at 1 Corinthians 1, verse 18 to 2, verse 5, which I find personally incredibly encouraging. And I do pray that this morning you'd be encouraged as well and motivated to share the good news of Jesus.

But let's pray that God would lead us. We're dependent on Him. He inspired these words, and He also brings them to life by His Spirit. So let's pray. Father, thank You for Your grace. Thank You that we can be together.

And Lord, we do thank You that You've spoken. We thank You that You continue to speak by Your Word. And we thank You that Your Spirit indwells us, guides us, and leads us in Your truth.

And so we humbly confess our dependence upon You. And pray that the Spirit of truth would lead us and point us to Your Son, the truth. And make Your Word come alive.

[ 1 : 06 ] Father, that You would demonstrate, as Paul even writes here, Your power and wisdom to the gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I know it's school holidays, but next week's school holidays end.

For some of us, it's bad news because we wake up earlier. But almost every morning, with my girls, after school, after dropping the Morfitt School, one of the things I love doing is listening to talk shows.

Anyone do that while you're driving? Or when you're stuck in gridlock? Usually, I listen to Pratsam and Commentar. Yes, I listen to Areschia. This is the Ian. Just saying. But what's interesting, usually, sometime, one of the talk shows, almost once a week, there's a little bit of a discussion about the church and Christianity in the 21st century, and that's usually discussed, particularly its relevance on a particular issue.

And normally what happens, generally, in that discussion, it's recognized that the Bible is in conflict with modern trends. That usually comes up. Meaning the Bible is offensive to many 21st century sensibilities.

But what I always find striking is the response from the experts that are usually invited to come speak at these talk shows. And generally, it goes something like this.

[ 2 : 20 ] Maybe you've heard this before. Or they usually say, we need to recognize that the Bible is an ancient 2,000-year-old document, and so we cannot expect it to be relevant and to apply to us today.

And normally what happens then, it's saying we need to reinvent the message, reinvent Christianity to be compatible with the 21st century. Have you heard that before? Just say yes if you have.

I'm just checking if you're with me. And maybe you feel the same. Maybe you felt that temptation yourself. You know you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But you find it incredibly difficult to share that message with others.

Because you know the message of the cross and the resurrection of Jesus. No matter how you say it, will at some stage be offensive. Or it would be ridiculed. Or someone might even think it's foolish.

Maybe you've heard people even respond to you saying something like this. You're telling me I'm such a bad person that God had to personally come down and suffer and die for me on a cross?

[ 3 : 22 ] You've got such a negative view of people. Maybe you've even heard people say, why would God allow suffering and death? And then experience suffering himself. That makes no sense.

Or I've never seen someone rise from the dead before. Or now you expect me to believe in this person called Jesus who rose from the dead? And in response, when you get those responses, you might feel in your heart, well maybe, maybe we should change the message a little bit.

You know, just make it more sensible. Or make it more relevant. Or cut out the parts of this message that would be offensive. Or maybe you might think, well actually what we need is better speakers.

If only there was another C.S. Lewis around the corner. And we could just get him and he could speak the faith. Then people will get it. And we're not alone in this. Because when you start reading the letter to the Corinthians.

When you look at that letter, you'll discover that they struggled with these problems themselves. The Church of Corinth. Because when you look at the context, you will discover that the message of the resurrection.

[ 4 : 25 ] Or the cross and resurrection of Jesus was not more popular or easier to believe back then as it is today. In fact, it was probably harder to digest for first century years.

Maybe just to give you an idea. Second century Roman rhetorician Fronto. When he looked at the message of Jesus. This was his conclusion. He says this. The religion of Christians is insane.

And that they worship a crucified man. And even the instrument of the punishment itself. You've got to be insane to believe it. Another person, contemporary of him, the philosopher Celsus, put it this way.

To believe in the message of Jesus, you either had to be uneducated or stupid. That was his conclusion. And living in a society like that.

That was the society the Church of Corinth found itself in. There was tremendous pressure to change or upgrade the message of Jesus.

[ 5 : 26 ] To be more compatible with their audience, with the people around them. And so you found when you read the letter, you'll discover some of them among them started saying, There is no resurrection of the dead.

Chapter 15. Because that doesn't fit first century here as thinking. There were others, for example, who wanted to rival the philosophical schools around them. They desired gurus or leaders that would reflect the society out there.

Who would use words, as Paul says, of human wisdom. And so there was a lot of debate in the Church. Who would be the best leader to represent that? To do that? So you had to the Church.

Some saying, Paul's our man. He can do it. He planted this Church. Others would say, no, no, no, no, no. Apollos. He's a powerful speaker. And others would say, no, we should go to Cephas, the rock.

Peter. He's the one. He can do it for us. Yet contrary to their way of thinking, and this is very important, Paul reminds them that the Gospel was never preached, he says, with human wisdom in our passage.

[ 6 : 30 ] Whereas we always strive to make the Gospel message accessible to people, that they would try and grasp it as far as possible, it will always be offensive.

And it will always facilitate two responses, which he highlights in chapter 1, verse 18 for you. You should always expect both these responses when you share the Gospel of Jesus.

Chapter 1, verse 18. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. See what he's saying?

When you share the good news of Jesus, it will always divide humanity into two groups of people. Those who are rejected, who conclude it's foolish, and they perish.

And those who experience God's wisdom and power in the message, and they're saved. And you should expect both. And so carefully, Paul explains that understanding and believing in Jesus has never been a question of human ability.

[ 7 : 35 ] It's never been up to us to believe. How good you listen, how good you think, how good you speak. It's always been up to God's power at work.

God takes the glory, no one else. We need to realize, as Paul continues to explain, that God chose the foolish message of the cross, verses 19 to 25 of chapter 1, to outsmart, he says, human wisdom, to humble it.

Look at verse 19. He cites Isaiah 29, verse 14 and verse 19, because he reminds them that God's purpose has always been to humble and judge humanity's arrogance.

Of relying upon themselves, thinking that through their own ability, how they think, they can know God. Like he says, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.

In fact, as Paul points out in verse 20 for you, no one, he says, by themselves was ever able to figure out or even imagine God's plan of salvation through a crucified king, Jesus.

[ 8 : 46 ] No one imagined it. None of the experts, he says, the wise man, the scholar, the philosopher, all the educated people back then, could have foreseen or imagined that God would bring salvation and reveal himself.

Through a crucified Christ. Verse 21 puts it this way, the world through its wisdom did not know him. Maybe to put it another way for you, the reason the message of the cross is in conflict with every single worldview out there, every single idea people could imagine, is because the message of the cross is not of this world.

Sure, the events of the crucifixion was in this world, but its meaning and its significance is not of this world. And that's why it's in conflict.

It's from God. And because of this, as Paul unpacks for us, for both the Jewish audience and the Greek audience back then, Christ crucified, it seemed a total contradiction.

Just didn't make sense. For the Jews, for example, the message of the cross, the Messiah crucified, as Paul says, it was a stumbling block, or another way of translating it, a scandal to them.

[ 10 : 04 ] Because remember, the dominant view during Jesus' day was that the Messiah, who will represent the nation of Israel, will be a powerful military king who will conquer their enemies, crush them, establish the kingdom of God with them as the beneficiaries.

That was their view. That was their hope. Yet Jesus, whom the apostles proclaimed to be the Messiah, was crucified.

And according to the Jewish law, in the law of Moses, a person who is hung on a tree, Deuteronomy 21 verse 23, is cursed by God. So imagine you're a Jew, and you hear this message of the crucified Christ.

How can it be that Jesus, the Messiah, is crucified, cursed by God? How can the one who represents me be cursed by God?

The cross was an insult and a scandal to the Jewish expectation of the Messiah. And for the Greek, I mean, he tells us, for the Greek, the message of the cross, it just seemed utter foolishness.

[ 11 : 13 ] I mean, to give you an idea, for the Greek, the cross represented weakness, and punishment, and defeat, and shame. It was a brutal instrument of death, which was reserved for rebels, and the worst criminals, to demonstrate Rome's justice, and power.

And in Paul's day, for example, just to give you an idea, there was Latin slang, which was, go to the cross. It's the equivalent today, of saying to someone, go to hell. That's the type of language, which people would use about the cross, in public.

It was a foul word. And in most Greek philosophies, for example, they argue that the physical world, is inferior, and the goal of the philosopher, is to escape this physical world, to be released from this physical world, my body.

Now think about it. The message of the cross tells us, no, God the Son became a human being. God embraced the human body.

He didn't escape from it. He embraced it. He suffered shame, and defeat, and punishment, and pain, and death, of the cross.

[ 12 : 24 ] And the man Jesus, resurrected from the dead, a bodily resurrection. To the Greek, and the Roman, who heard this message, they concluded, when you read their writings, they said, it's a superstition.

They said, it's evil. And here, as Paul says, it's foolishness. And don't we see the same response today? Don't we? I mean, to give you an idea, we live in a society, that's progressively becoming more humanistic, and naturalistic.

What I mean by humanistic, is humanism generally, has a very positive view of humanity. Humanity is intrinsically good, or maybe a mixed bag, but you can teach him to be good. Maybe you've heard that before.

And tied to that idea, is naturalism, or materialism, which is this idea, this life is the only life we have now. Meaning, there's nothing before, or after this life, and there's definitely, no supernatural cause, or end to anything.

And so you have these maxims, that people live with, right? YOLO, you only live once. Which, by the way, creates a lot of FOMO, the fear of missing out. Because you only live once. Right?

[ 13 : 34 ] Why do you think, so many people are in a panic, to experience as much as they can? And think about it, if you've imbibed that world view, if that's the world view you've imbibed, I'm a good person, I only live once, I want to experience as much as I can in this world, the cross would be very offensive to you.

It wouldn't make sense. Because, the cross tells us, no, there is a God. And the cross tells us, it's a God who became so personal, that he took on human flesh.

He became a human being, just like you and me, as the historical man Jesus. The cross tells us, that the world is not all that there is.

The cross tells us, you don't only live once, and the only fear you should have, is the fear of missing out, on God's eternal kingdom. And the cross tells us, that people are so bad, so wicked, so bent on doing sin, that when God the Son, stood right before them, what they did with him, is they crucified him.

And the cross tells us, we cannot fix ourselves, and we deserve God's judgment. The cross tells us, that God had to come down, to die the death we deserve, and rise to the new life, that we desperately need, to save us.

[ 14 : 54 ] To someone who believes, people are inherently good, and this world is all there is. It doesn't matter how I say it, the message of the cross, and resurrection of Jesus, it will be offensive.

And they might consider it foolish, right? But look what Paul says, he actually says, that's the point. That's the point. God's chosen message, Christ crucified, completely befuddles, outsmarts, humbles, all human wisdom, and thinking.

The only way someone, will ever believe it, is true, is by a miracle. And that's the point. It's a miracle. See what he says, in verses 24 to 25, God chose, the message of weakness, and folly, Christ crucified, to demonstrate, his power.

His power. Sure, human wisdom, would call God's message foolish, or a scandal, but he says, it's through this message, verse 24, that God has called, both Jews and Greeks.

And the only reason, they believe, as he says in verse 24, is because they've experienced, God's power, and wisdom, in Jesus. In the seeming, weak, and foolish message, of the cross, God displays, his infinite wisdom, and power.

[ 16 : 20 ] He says, for the foolishness of God, is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God, is stronger than man's strength. Because what human wisdom, could not see, is that on the cross, God in his wisdom, as he says in chapter 15, Jesus died for our sins.

And what human strength, could never do, defeat death, God in his strength, through the resurrection of Jesus, triumphed over death. And without God's empowering call, in your life, through this message, of Christ crucified, no one will be able, to see, understand, believe, and follow Jesus.

It's a miracle. So I actually want you, to do something this morning, something very important. You need to realize this. When you look around you, when you go have tea, when you go home, think about this.

The only reason you and I, are here this morning, is not because someone, ultimately persuaded us, it's a good idea. No, it's because God called you. That's why.

The only reason, any person believes, is because they have experienced, God's powerful call, God's powerful call, in their lives, when you shared, or someone shared, this good news with you.

[ 17 : 38 ] Everyone who's sitting here, believes and follows Jesus, is a walking, talking, miracle. And that should make you excited, by the way, to share this good news, because when you do, you will see, miracles.

You will see, people come to faith, and follow him. Because God calls people, through this message. Isn't that incredible? You're miracles.

I'm a miracle. Yet what about, the people God chose? That's the message. What about, the people God chooses? Contrary to what, some people might think, that only smart people, will get the gospel.

God chose people, actually mirror his message, that look like his message. I find that very encouraging, by the way, because I'm one of them. As Paul continues, God did not just, choose a foolish message, but also he says, God chose a foolish people.

Look at verses 26 to 31. The Corinthian church, by the way, was progressively imbibing, the value system, that was around them. If you study, the Corinthian society, back then, people were generally stratified, according to their ethnicity, education, and class.

[ 18 : 55 ] And people, valued people, by the way, back then, who were educated, upper class, or had political, economic, or military connections, and power. Basically, the movers and shakers of the world, that will benefit you.

Nothing's changed, right? That's society, back then, in Corinth. And the Corinthian church, was in danger, of adopting that view, themselves. Like, we should only reach out, to those people, people.

Yet, Paul reminds them, who they were, before they came to know God, through Jesus. Before God called them. Look what he says, in verse 26. Brothers, think of what you were, when you were called.

Remember, not many of you, were wise, by human standards. Not many were influential. Not many were, of noble birth. Look, although the good news, goes out to everyone, rich and poor, educated, uneducated.

Paul makes the point, that the majority, of the Corinthian church, they were actually, the majority of them, were the dropouts, the losers, the rejects of society, the foolish things.

[ 20 : 00 ] As he says, God chose the foolish things, of the world, to shame the strong. He chose the lowly, things of this world, that are not, to nullify the things, that are. The majority, of those, God called, were the people, the world, the world, would consider, hopeless, and worthless.

And Paul's saying, yet God called them, the people, the world, would quit on. And there's a profound, reason for it. And it's the same, as the message, by the way, it is to underscore, that salvation, believing, and following Jesus, has nothing to do, with human ability.

Whether you're smart, or educated, wise, by human standards, it's got nothing to do, with your background, your family line, your residential address, your income, your culture, your class, your position of influence.

None of those things count. No, salvation is completely, dependent on God, who shows grace, and mercy. And that's why, God chose the people, he chose. It's to underscore that.

It's God, who chooses. As Paul says, in verse 29, so that no one, may boast before him. No one can say, it's because of something, I am. No one can take the credit, but God.

[ 21 : 15 ] As he says, it's only because of God, he says, that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us, wisdom from God, that is our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. See what he's saying?

The message of Jesus, and the people of Jesus, mirror one another, and the purpose behind it, is to shatter, all human pride, and sense of importance, and ability.

So that in the end, everyone would just say, the only reason we're here, is because of God. And God is still working this way, by the way. I mean, when you go read the Gospels, we shouldn't forget, that one of the greatest criticisms, of Jesus, was those who followed him.

I mean, have you ever considered, who the twelve disciples were? I mean, most of them were fishermen, there was a tax collector, there was a zealot, basically a terrorist, back then. I mean, they were a motley crew, and yet he chose them.

Interestingly enough, during the majority, in the history of the church, the majority of the church, has always been, dropouts, losers, outcasts, the have-nots. So for example, the guy I quoted earlier, Celsus, one of his major critiques, of the church, was look who are the people, who go there.

[ 22 : 26 ] It's of the lower classes, and the lower people, of society. He put it this way, back then the lower class people, and the lower people, of society, where the cobblers, and the tanners, and the slaves, and the women, and the children, he said, look, that's the majority, of the church.

But for me, that should encourage us, right? That's actually an encouragement. For them, it was a criticism, for us, it's an encouragement. It encourages us, to share the gospel, with anyone.

With anyone. No matter where they're from, no matter who they are, share it with anyone. And really, take the time, after the service, just to sit down, and consider, who are all the people, God has put in my life?

And you'll be surprised, you'll probably discover, that you know people, from all sorts of backgrounds, and walks of life. Right? People from different, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds, lower, or higher incomes, different occupations, different life stories.

We know all sorts of people. And what you need to consider, is that God probably put those people, in your life, for the explicit reason, to share the goodness of Jesus, with them.

[ 23 : 40 ] That's why they're there. To share it with them, to evangelize them, to tell them about, the message of the cross, and the resurrection of Jesus. And when you go, to share it with them, you need to realize, that the potential, for them to respond, to the gospel, has never been determined, by their background.

Where they live, what they do, how well educated they are. None of that stuff matters. No, their response, has always been up to God. It's always been up to God.

It is God, who chose the foolish things, of the world, to shame the wise. God, who chose the weak things, of the world, to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things, of this world, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are, so that no one, may boast before him.

So think about those people, you know, pray for them. And then boldly, whether that's over a cup of coffee, or just indirectly, through conversation, or just inviting them, to come on a Sunday, to see what God's doing, among us, to tell them about Jesus.

And I can guarantee you, you will be surprised, who will respond. Personally, I've always been surprised, that it's the people, I thought least responsive, that respond.

[ 24 : 58 ] You will be surprised. So share that good news, with anyone. And look, you might feel intimidated by this, I feel intimidated by this, so how will you, how can I, you might even be thinking, how can I possibly share this good news?

Sure, the message, and the people, but me, the messenger, can I do it? I might fumble over my words, I've never been trained, in EE3, and all the other courses, on evangelism, how can I actually share, this message?

Notice how Paul ends, I also find this encouraging, God, and not just choose a foolish message, and the foolish people, look at chapter 2, verse 1 to 5, Paul says, look, God chose a foolish messenger, Paul reminds him, it's not just the message, and the people, it's me too, he actually says, so am I, so am I, he says, when I came to you brothers, I did not come to you, with eloquence, or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you, the testimony about God, no one would have thought me smart, Paul stuck, just to sharing, the foolish messages, of Jesus Christ, and uncrucified, that's what he shared, with people, and even when he did it, he says, I didn't do it, with gusto, and self-confidence, or bravado, he actually says, I came to you in weakness, and fear, and with much trembling, have you ever pictured, the apostle Paul, to be like that, shaking, as he's telling people, about Jesus, so contrary to what, a lot of people, might think about, the apostle Paul, he wasn't impressive, to look at, and to listen to, the world wasn't impressed, by him, he looked like the message, weak and foolish, church, yet look what he's saying, it was through, weak and foolish Paul, that God chose, to work the wonder, of calling people, to Jesus, it was through, weak and foolish Paul, that the Corinthian church, he says, saw a demonstration, of the spirit's power, chapter 2 verse 4, a miracle of faith, so when you share, the gospel, you might feel, very unimpressive, weak, and fearful, and intimidated, realize the apostle Paul, was as well, and it doesn't matter, it's still up to God, who works through you, he does the work, you're just his instrument, a master musician, can play beautifully, even with a very poor instrument, and God is the master, of saving souls, and he can use, broken and weak, you and me, to save people, and I mean, just personally, in many ways, that's how I came, to believe and follow in Jesus, because I heard, many good speakers, speak on the message, of Jesus, when I was a teenager, but God never, called me through them,

I'm sure God used them, to prepare me for it, but actually, how I came to faith, was one evening, with my parents, and they just sat me down, and we looked, at the gospel of Mark, and they shared some passages, from the gospel of Mark, there was nothing, impressive about it, they just asked one question, what did Jesus do, with people, who came to him in need, that was the question, and so passage, by passage, we just looked at people, who came to Jesus, who were in need, over and over, and over, there was nothing, profound about it, there was no rhetoric, there was no beautiful speech, there was no impressive words, and that's all, but amazingly, going through that simple, exercise, God demonstrated, his power and wisdom, he opened my eyes, he made me see, the reality of Jesus, in those passages, made me see, I am that person in need, and that I am that person, who came to him, and how he embraced me, and accepted me, and he changed me, and I became a believer, and follower of Jesus, and I've never turned back, it was his work, so no, you don't need, to reinvent, the message of Jesus, stick to the cross, and resurrection of Jesus, you don't need, the potential, for someone believing, has never been dependent, on them, their background, and you don't have, to be impressive, to share the good news, of Jesus, all you have to do, is believe, that God chose, a foolish message, a foolish people, and a foolish messenger, to demonstrate, his wisdom, and power, and if you believe that, you can go out, and share the good news, of Jesus, and see, how he works, wonders, that's what we've been, called to do, and when you step out, in faith, and you share, that message of Jesus, or invite people, to come here, to hear the message, of Jesus, you will see, the miracle, of God's power, at work, where people turn, and see the wonder, of it, that's the encouragement, from this letter, and I really pray, that we'll all be encouraged, to go share, this wonderful news, let's pray,



Father, we want to thank you, that you demonstrated, your wisdom, and your power, in a way, nobody could have ever, imagined, where we would expect, acts of strength, you acted, in weakness, by dying, on a cross, sending your son, to die, in our place, and Father, we do pray, that you would help us, to cherish, this message, and Father, be willing, to share it, and we want to thank you, that you called, people like us, people that are, unimpressive, people that the world, might not even consider, you considered, and chose, to demonstrate, your power, and wisdom, and Father, we thank you, that you sent, someone on our path, to share this, wonderful news, with us, people who are, unimpressive, and weak, and we might have, even considered foolish, yet you use them, to demonstrate, your power, and wisdom, and Father, ultimately, as we just look, at how you work, we can only say, to you alone, be the praise, and the glory, and the honor, because it really, is just a work, from you, and Father, we do pray, that we would be, encouraged by this, and Father, continue to boldly, go share this, wonderful message, with others, no matter, their backgrounds, and Father, see the wonder, of you at work, and calling people, to yourself, the miracle, of conversion, and new birth, and Lord, that we would sing, praises to you, as more people come, to believe, and follow you, use us, we pray, in Jesus name, for your glory alone,

[ 31 : 59 ]    Amen.