

Preaching One Simple Truth: Christ Crucified
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Wasilla Bible Church
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Ok, let's start this time with prayer. So please join with me.

Lord God,

Thank You for bringing us to this point in our congregational life where, as we talked last week, as Larry shared about the next step, the next direction we'll be going, placing emphasis on 1000 days of witness. God, I ask that You would help us to be faithful to that. And Lord, I ask that You would just meet with us here today as we come into Your word to see what You have for us. God, I ask that You would give us ears to hear the truth of Your word, that You would give us minds to understand it, and most importantly, that You would give us hearts to hold onto it, and to be transformed by it.

And we pray this in Your name. Amen.

Well, imagine with me, if you will, three people. And the first is a televangelist, faith healer, famous person...travels all over the place, all around the globe, or region, or whatever it may be. Any time he comes into town the crowds just swarm around. There's TV cameras, and people want to be there and be part of the show. Why? Because there are going to be amazing, miraculous things that happen. It's just...it follows him everywhere. And so he's famous. And not only that, but as a result he also becomes a man of means. He ends up receiving financial support...money and everything else, from all kinds of people who want to be a part of his miraculous power. That's the first guy.

The second guy is a government official. He is pretty famous, but in a different sort of way. He has been asked to be a part of the president's cabinet, or whatever it may be. He was trained in powerful schools, things like...think about he got a business degree from Harvard for his bachelor's, and went on to Oxford and got a PhD in international relations, international relations, commerce, that sort of a thing. And so, of course, you know he is the most brilliant man, can figure out anything when it comes to any sort of economy or anything else. And so the president says, 'Hey, would you like to be on my cabinet here and be my advisor in all matters of state regarding the economy?' And so the guy says, 'Sure.' And he surely has to be an example of someone who is intelligent, and wise, and smart, and everything that we look and we want to be, or many people want to be, in our world.

There's a third person that we'll imagine here, and he's a refugee. His people have started to be killed...socio-political fighting. His best friend was just killed in his hometown. And so he gets out of Dodge and he is on the run. I mean, he is moving. He doesn't have anything else with him other than the clothes on his back, because he is just goin' and movin', and movin', and movin'. He is fleeing persecution.

You would probably look at this guy and ask 'What in the world does he have to offer? The other two guys, they seem to have things going for them. What does this third guy have to offer?' You would also ask, 'What in the world do these three people have to do with anything in Acts, or with anything with one another?' But that's kind of what we here in the eighth chapter of Acts. There is a gentleman who is a sorcerer. He is a worker of miracles. He has some sort of supernatural power by which he does miracles. You have this person who is a eunuch. He is an official in a nation's economy, and he is a very powerful, intelligent man. And then you have this Christian who is on the run. What in the world do these three people have to do with one another? Why in the world would their lives ever intersect, and connect, and impact one another?

Before we look at that let's get a picture of who these three people were. One—Simon...he's this sorcerer, this healer who has some sort of supernatural power. In fact, he claims to be someone great. He loves it, when he comes into town, that everybody drops what they're doing and comes to see him. In fact, he becomes known as the great power of God, and so he is just...he is an amazing sight to behold. And whenever people come and talk to him, or come and meet with him, miraculous things happen. He's known for having great spiritual power.

There's this eunuch. He's from Ethiopia. Now, with him, don't think about Ethiopia as we oftentimes think about it in the stereotypical way today. Ethiopia at this point in time was a very powerful country. Think of something more in line with Egypt in its heyday, back in the ancient times where, you know, they didn't have people starving, famine, everything else. It was a very powerful and prosperous nation. And this particular guy...he's the head of the national treasury. Imagine that the president of the United States says, 'Here, will you come be on my cabinet? Now here's the keys to Fort Knox. You do whatever you think is best with all that gold there. It's yours; you take care of it; you do whatever you think is best.' That's basically what happens with this guy. His is someone who is in a position of power and prominence. He is very trusted. He's probably one of the most highly-trained and intellectual people in the world at this time. You don't rise to this level of prominence and power without being that intelligent. He goes up, and he ends up deciding to worship in Jerusalem. He's trying to figure out, and wrap his mind around, God. And he goes up and he worships in Jerusalem, and he's on his way back home. That's where we find him in this process of the story.

And then the Christian...this Christian is a man by the name of Philip. He's not an apostle. He's just a simple man who was a part of the early church. He was a co-worker of Stephen. He was one of the guys back in the early days of the church...the church started growing so quickly that what ended up happening was there were widows and orphans, and people in need, who needed help. And so the church started helping provide for those people's needs, and as they did so the apostles got to the point that they said, 'You know what? There are far too many people here for us to take care of these people on our own. It's pulling us away from preaching, and teaching, and prayer, and studying the scripture, which is what our primary focus is to be.' So they said, 'Go ahead, choose a few guys and we'll have them run this needy ministry.' And Philip was one of those guys. He's a refugee. He's on the run. See, what happened is after Stephen's death...he was stoned in Jerusalem...and everybody except the apostles, all these Christians, they scattered. They started runnin'. They headed for the hills, because they knew what was coming. They knew that there was persecution, and who knows who would be next? So Philip, he gets out of there. He runs.

That's these characters; and you would ask, 'Ok, so what in the world ties them together? Why do their lives intersect?' In order to fully understand it, we'll look at one more thing before we look at what binds these people together. We wanna look at what motivates these people, what makes them tick, why do they do the things they do. Why is this Simon guy...why is he traveling around doing all this miraculous...all these miraculous things? Why is this eunuch going up to Jerusalem and kinda coming back when...I mean, why would he go to worship there when he is one of the most powerful men in the world, and he has a nice government job where he has the keys to Fort Knox? And why would this Christian have anything to do with either of these guys when he's on the run, fearful for his life?

Well, the motivation for Simon is pretty simple. He's looking for power; he's looking for power. See, what matters most to him, it would seem here, is spiritual power. He enjoys the influence that it gives him. He enjoys the fact that when he walks into town people know his name. And so what happens is he's looking for power. And what ends up happening, and we'll talk about it a little bit more in just a moment, is in this story when he encounters power greater than he has experienced, he wants to get a hold of it, and he says, 'Hey, I want some of that power. Give me that power.' He's motivated by power—in particular, spiritual.

The eunuch, the guy from Ethiopia, he's looking for wisdom. That's what he's looking for; that's what he wants to figure out. He's wrestling with some of the greatest problems, philosophical problems, in all of life—who is God? How do you know God? How do you interact with God? How do you have this relationship? What is the proper way to worship...whatever else. And so he goes up to Jerusalem; he's worshipping in Jerusalem. And when we encounter him in the story he's reading through Isaiah, trying to understand it. He's trying to make sense and wrap his mind around God that you see in scripture. He's looking for wisdom.

Then we have this Christian, Philip. What makes him tick is everywhere he goes he's proclaiming the gospel, the good news. He's taking this message everywhere it goes. He does some miracles, and he talks to different people; but the thing that is constantly said throughout this whole passage, throughout the whole chapter—everywhere he goes he is proclaiming the gospel. He's telling people about Jesus. Yeah, he's on the run. But you know what? That's fine. He's a refugee? That's fine. He's no longer in Jerusalem? That's fine. He's gonna tell people about Jesus, no matter where he is. In fact, it's so much a part of who he is that we see the first, like, teleportation...you know, you guys have seen "Star Trek" or whatever else, "Beam me up, Scotty," you know; all of a sudden you disappear from one place, appear in another. It seems like, in the text here, after he talks to the eunuch, after he talks to this Ethiopian guy...he's sharing with him about the gospel, and it says all of a sudden, you know, eunuch looks around, Phillip's no longer there. They're out in the middle of the desert, ok? Philip's no longer there, and eunuch says, 'Ok, whatever.' He goes on home.

Philip appears in some other town. And he looks around and says, 'Whoa! Hey, where am I? I don't know. Well, um, what should I do? Let's see...I'll tell people about Jesus.' And so he goes on tellin' people about Jesus. That's just who he is. That's what motivates him. And so he just keeps on going wherever God takes him, so that he can tell people about Jesus.

You see, the thing that draws these three people together...you might question it, but really it's just one simple truth. It's one simple truth, and it's a simple truth that is the underpinning of all of the gospel...all of the gospels and all of the book of Acts. It's a truth that I'll jump over one book to another book for just a moment because it encapsulates it in such a profound, and concise, and powerful way. And what we'll do is we'll look at that truth and then we'll come back here and we'll see how that truth applies in this passage.

That truth is simply this. It's in 1 Corinthians 1: 22-24. Paul is writing to the Corinthians, and he says, 'You know what? Jews, the Jewish people, they look for signs. That's what they wanna see. If you're from God, they wanna see the miracles, His proof. If God really exists, or if you have any sway with Him, show me the miracles. The Greeks, on the other hand, they're lookin' for wisdom. They want to understand. They're going to be philosophers. They want to use logic. And so they're going to approach it, and they say "Whenever God makes sense to my head, that's when I'll believe.'" And Paul turns around and he says, 'You know what?' to that person who wants to seek miracles, who wants to see all this other stuff, or to the person who wants to try and fully explain God, 'You know what I'm gonna tell 'em about? I'm gonna tell 'em about Jesus. And I'm gonna preach Him crucified.'

Why in the world would Paul want to preach Christ crucified to somebody who wants to see miracles, or to somebody who wants to engage in some sort of philosophical debate? It's the simple truth that *to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is both God's power and His wisdom*. See, Christ...and Christ crucified...is the answer to all those questions about power, about wisdom, and everything. If you want to understand the fullness of God's power look at Christ. If you want to understand the fullness of His wisdom, look at Christ.

That's what we see back here in this passage with Simon the sorcerer. He's looking for power; that's what he wants. In fact, in the course of this series, in the course of this story, he sits here, and he comes into town; he's working miracles. The crowds come, everybody's excited, things are good. Philip comes into town and he's doing miracles as well. The real thing that sets these two apart is Philip is also telling people about Jesus. And he starts saying, 'You know what? I don't care about your money. What I care about is whether or not you experience the power of God in your life.' And so he starts telling people about Jesus. And what ends up happening is people's lives start being transformed. People start deciding to follow Jesus.

And Peter and John, they hear about this...two of the apostles, they hear about this, and they come to Samaria from Jerusalem. And so they look around, and they say, 'You know what? Here are these people, and they are followers of Christ.' And so what they do...it's kind of like stage two or three in the whole progression of Acts, seeing God's...Jesus' name proclaimed in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. And what happens is the apostles, they come in and they lay their hands on these people, and they pray to God, and it's like Pentecost all over again. The Holy Spirit comes and He indwells these people's lives.

And Simon looks at that and he says, 'That is power.' He is totally amazed, because he has never seen anyone ever before be able to lay their hands on somebody or whatever it is, pray, actually talk to God, and God comes and dwells in someone's heart, in someone's life. And so he says, 'I want that power.' And he asks the disciples...the apostles...he talks to Peter and John and he says, 'Hey, how much money do you want? I got...I'm a man of means; I can pay for it. How much money do you want, to give me this power, because I want this power. I wanna be able to have God come into people's lives, too.'

The problem is he doesn't understand the gospel. Peter and John look at him and they say, 'You know what? Your heart isn't right for God...but...with God. We aren't doin' this for money. We aren't doin' it for prestige. We aren't doing this for power. We aren't doing this for anything else.' See, Simon is looking for some sort of miracle. He's just looking for the next, big, miraculous thing, and he thinks, 'Man, this is gonna be the next stage in my show, in my traveling show. Here we go, if I can get God to come into people's lives.' He doesn't understand.

I think of a conversation that I had with Joel this past week. We were talking about his passage, and we were talkin' about 1 Corinthians as well. And something that he said stuck out to me. He said, "You know, a lot of times we think of God's power, and we want it to be flashy." But the simple power that is expressed when Jesus Christ comes into somebody's life and transforms them from the inside out is a power that is so far beyond any other miracle that can happen. It is a power that is inexpressible, and it is not topped anywhere else. I don't care how many people you heal; I don't care how many blind people can now see. I don't care if you walk on water. A more powerful and miraculous thing is when God comes in and lives inside your heart and transforms you from the inside out. If you wanna see God's power, it's not displayed in all the flashy things that can be counterfeited in all kinds of creation, because God is not the only supernatural power out there. If you wanna witness God's power, it's in His power to indwell and transform a person's life. And that is only made possible through Christ.

Simon didn't yet get that. He still thought it was all about the show. And they said, 'You know what? Your heart isn't right with God. You just don't even get it.' See, Christ is God's power revealed. That's why we preach Him crucified, because it is by Christ crucified that God's most powerful act can take place—the transformation of a human heart that is full of sin.

So how is Christ God's wisdom? Well, for that we'll look at the eunuch. He was lookin' for wisdom. He went up to Jerusalem to worship. He's on his way back, and he's reading through Isaiah, and he doesn't fully understand it. I don't know, maybe he's squintin' his eyes, shakin' his head...I don't know, whatever it is, scratchin' his head, I don't know. But after Philip is done in Samaria, God tells him, 'Hey listen, you've done what I want you to do here. Now keep movin'.' And He takes him out to the desert, and here's Philip in the middle of the desert, and He says, 'See that chariot? I want you to go over there and talk to the guy in the chariot.' So he goes over here, talks to the guy in the chariot, and he says, 'Hey, what's up? Do you understand what you're readin'? I see you're kinda scratchin' your head, tryin' to figure out what you're reading. Do you understand it?'

And the eunuch, he turns around and he says, 'How in the world can I understand it unless if somebody actually explains this to me?' You see, the eunuch has finally come to the point where he understands that there is a limit to his understanding. There is a point where our human wisdom ends and God's wisdom has only just begun. What Paul would say is, that point is Christ crucified.

What do I mean? Well, there is an issue that we deal with, and this issue is basically that we like to say that God is love. God is mercy. God loves me, He's merciful, He doesn't want anything bad to happen to me. He just wants to live with me forever. This is true. I do not deny that whatsoever. I fully embrace it, and that is one of the reasons that I am so very thankful to know the God of the universe. But here's the thing...God is not only good, and loving, and merciful, but He is also just. He is fair. And it would not be just...it would be unjust if He ever lets someone go without making them have a proper punishment...if somebody commits a crime and the proper, corresponding punishment is not paid, that's not fair.

So see, we have this paradox here. Because the simple fact of the matter is that I am a sinner. Every single person in this room is a sinner. Everyone in the whole world is a sinner. We all come to the point where we say, 'You know what, God? I wanna do my own thing. I wanna think my own thoughts. I want to live my own life. I want to want, desire, lust after...whatever it is...whatever I want to do. I don't want You to tell me what I want to do. I want to run my own life.' We all do that at various points. And so, because of that, that is an ultimate dishonor to God. It's scandalous. And so we deserve this punishment.

Here's...there are people who say, 'Well, I mean, what's the big deal? Can't God just go ahead and overlook this lie that I told, or whatever else? Why can't He just overlook it? I mean, He loves me. If He loves me, He'll overlook it.'

I've shared this example before, but so if you've heard this before, bear with me. I'll keep it short, but it's the best example that I can think of at the moment right now. But basically it's this. Let's imagine over at Tanaina, the elementary school over here, we have this track meet. And some kids run races. They're goin' all over the place. End of the day—"Yaaaay!!!"—everybody's a winner; ok, fine. So anyway, what happens is we pull the kids up, we're gonna award the first place prize to these kids, and so we pull out the ribbons. And we give the first place ribbon to some kid who didn't win the race. And we turn around, and we don't worry about givin' the first place ribbon to this kid who really did win the race. He didn't win [points to one imaginary kid], he gets the ribbon; he did win [points at another imaginary kid] but he doesn't. Ok? We've kind of dishonored, and there might be some little bit of people who say, 'Hey, what's up with that? You gave the ribbon to the wrong guy. This kid didn't earn it.' But that's about it. There might be some parents who ask questions. Nobody gets too worked up about it.

Do the same thing at the Olympics. Take the gold medal and put it on somebody who didn't even place. Especially picture that...picture that happening back in the Cold War, and it was an American or like a Soviet Union...like a Soviet athlete, American athlete...and somebody like puts the medal on the wrong one. And, oh man! Now they aren't just tearin' this guy down who deserves this honor, but now 'They're attackin' our country; oh man, those Americans!' or 'Those Soviets!' And we're gonna push the button, or I don't know. The thing is, it's scandalous. Why is it scandalous? It's the same mistake; it's the same thing that's done. It's scandalous because that Olympic athlete has worked his or her whole life to accomplish that feat. And so they are more worthy of that honor than anybody else. They are more worthy of that honor than that little elementary kid.

How does this relate to God? It's simply this—there's a simple, philosophical, emotional truth that we all know in our hearts...that scandal is directly proportionate...it's exactly equal to the amount that somebody deserves honor. If somebody deserves a whole lot of honor, it's scandalous when they don't receive it, and it just totally strikes at the core of our being. If somebody doesn't deserve honor so much we don't really get so worked up about it, and we say, 'Well, they didn't really earn it.'

Here's the thing...God deserves an infinite amount of honor. He is an infinite God who is the creator and the source of everything good and true and beautiful in all of creation. He deserves an infinite amount of honor. And so when we do not give it to Him, when we rebel and we say, 'You know what? Get out of my face; I wanna live my life the way I want to live it,' we are committing an infinite dishonor and there is an infinite amount of scandal.

And so how can God be fair if He doesn't reward an infinite amount of scandal, an infinite crime, with an infinite punishment? You see, the simple fact of the matter is that, because I am a sinner, I deserve an infinite punishment. Anything else would be scandalous.

So that's the confusing thing about God. That's the dilemma we're in here. God totally, *totally*, loves us. He wants a relationship with me. The God of the universe, the creator of it all, wants a relationship with me. But if He lets me off the hook then He has just totally been unjust, and He has totally abandoned any sense of justice, and the whole framework of justice totally flies out the window. And He is no longer God.

So how's He gonna solve it? It seems to be an unsolvable thing, and that's where the beauty and the wonder and the wisdom of Christ enters in. You see, Christ is 100% God and 100% man. He is 100% human, and so He can step into my place and He can say, 'You know what? I am a human who lived a perfect life, perfectly honoring God the Father as He was supposed to be honored. And what can happen is, because I am a human and I lived this perfect life, and I was wrongfully killed, and I died a death that I did not deserve, I can step into your place. And it's apples for apples—one human life for another human life.'

Of course, because He's also God, the simple thing is that I am a finite being. I am a being that has limits, and so I could try for all of eternity to pay off an infinite debt, and I will not yet have it paid off. I'm finite; I am not infinite in nature, so I cannot... Think about it this way...if I have to pay back somebody an infinite amount of dollars, I can pay a million dollars every second, forever, and I still have infinity to go. I'm never gonna pay it back. But Christ—He was 100% God. He is an infinite being. And He could take my sin and, in a moment, He could say "It is finished." And He could say, 'You know what? Here is a human life for human life. But because I am also God, I can pay off an infinite debt that is owed.'

That's why Christ crucified is a demonstration of God's wisdom. It allows Him to still maintain His character, and it also allows it where we can have a relationship with Him. And He still punishes the crime that I commit. It's just that He willingly takes it on Himself. That's the wisdom of Christ crucified.

So what about Philip? What about this Christian here? Well, the eunuch...the big thing that he needs to understand and he begins to grasp is this. The wisdom of God, Himself, is found in Christ. That's what he begins to realize. Philip...how about this? Him...his motivation is proclaiming the good news, proclaiming the message of Christ. That is what makes him tick. You see, he has understood this truth that I fail to recognize on a regular basis in my life, that being a witness means preaching Christ crucified.

What distinguished Philip from Simon? It was the fact that Philip knew God, and was preaching Christ crucified. He was telling the good news, the gospel. What distinguished Philip with the eunuch? Well, the eunuch says, 'How...you know, I can't understand unless somebody explains it.' And Philip says, 'You know what? I can explain this.'

Throughout this passage it's not focused on what Philip is doing. It's focused on what he is sharing and telling people. I cannot be a witness unless I am speaking of Christ crucified. Philip working miracles didn't save anybody. This is something that I think we fail to recognize on a regular basis here in America. Why is that? Well, I think of...there's this quote by Francis of Assisi, and I have heard people quote this on a regular basis, in a variety of settings, over the last several years, especially when I was in college, and following college, and everything else. There's this quote by Francis of Assisi where he says, "Preach Christ. And when necessary, use words." Ok, nice. What's that mean? Well, he's sayin', 'Ok, go ahead, live your life; and when necessary, go ahead and explain the gospel.' The idea is make your words...or your life...preach the gospel for you. That's a good thing. But see, it doesn't apply in our culture because we've taken that, and we've made that our mantra. And so as we use that to excuse ourselves from actually speaking Christ crucified. See, Francis of Assisi...he was dealing with this whole other issue, where you had a fair number of priests and clergy who were talkin', talkin', talkin', and they would share the truth of Christ and Christ crucified, but then what they would do is they would turn around and live a life that totally rejects that. And he would say, 'You know what? How about you start preachin' with your lives, and then start worryin' about preachin' with your mouth?'

The problem is that I'm too much of a chicken. So I go ahead and live my life, and I don't ever talk about Christ crucified. And I console myself with the thing of 'Well, maybe if somebody sees my life they'll see the reason for the hope that's within me.' But I don't open my mouth. And the question of the eunuch comes to my mind—"How can I understand if nobody ever explains?" You see, the eunuch had been at the temple. He had gone to worship God. He was sittin' here, and he was reading through scripture, and he didn't understand it. This isn't some heathen guy out there in the middle of nowhere who hadn't ever looked at the Bible, or gone to church, or whatever else. The simple fact is that Philip didn't invite this eunuch to go to church. He didn't say, 'Look at my life. I live a good life. That should tell you all you need to know.' He didn't say, 'Guess what? I'm a Christian.' He told him about Jesus.

There's a simple truth that God has been just beating into me over the last week or two—that being a witness means speaking of Christ crucified. Until I've done that, I've not truly been a witness. Until I've shared with someone how God Himself, because of Christ's sacrifice, has come and lived inside of my heart and my life, and He has totally transformed and renewed my soul, and given me life that I cannot begin to comprehend and I am still growing in, day and day, and day, and day, and day after day. Until I do that and I share with them that truth, and I explain to them that they, too, can experience that truth, I have not been a witness. And that's a very sobering, sobering realization.

So, what pulls these people together? It's the simple truth of Christ, the good news of Christ. That's it. It's something that God wants to come in and transform each and every one of our lives, because He loves us. But we have to acknowledge the fact that, 'You know what? I will never be able to pay Him back, and I need somebody else to do it for me.' And so I trust Christ to do that for me.

Please stand. In just a moment I'm gonna go ahead and pray, and if you would like to speak with anyone about anything, you have some concern on your heart, if you have something on your mind, please feel free to come down front. We'd love to pray with you.

Let's pray.

Lord God,

Thank You so very much for the truth of Your Son, for the power and wisdom He demonstrates. God, thank You for that sacrifice. And God, I ask that You would use Your word, Your scripture, to begin to transform our lives. For those who do not yet know You I ask that that journey would begin. And for those who do, God, I ask that You would continue to work within us, and that You would be faithful to complete that work.

God, I ask that, as we go out this week, that You would bless us, and that You would help those of us who have chosen to follow You to truly be witnesses of Your Son.

And we pray this in Your name, amen.

Go in grace.