

Talking about God can be difficult. I've seen how talking about God can cause tenseness and awkwardness. People's defenses go up. What is this person going to require of me? What is this person going to accuse me of? Am I supposed to be converted? People usually don't like it.

Because people don't like it, most won't do it. Why should they? It doesn't seem to benefit them. It makes the situation weird. The prospects of something good coming from such an awkward situation seem low. Let the pastors talk about God. You should hold your peace.

If this life is all there is, then such a course of action makes sense. If the purpose of life is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain you should not talk about God. It won't make you richer. It might make you poorer. It won't make you more popular. You might, instead, be shunned. Common sense tells you to keep your mouth shut.

But if the Gospel is true, then being silent is strange. The Gospel teaches that all things are in the process of changing. Things are changing because Jesus is Lord and King. The old ways of how power and oppression are the most important and the most impactful are passing away. The new ways of faithfulness, humility, and love are how we receive blessing. Evil is in the process of being brought to nothing. Righteousness and life are on their way. Jesus says, "**Behold, I make all things new.**"

This is good news for everyone. Jesus being Lord and King is good because he is good. The only way that this good news is ineffectual for anyone is through unbelief. Unbelief, indeed, can be powerful. When Jesus teaches about the coming of the Holy Spirit in John chapter 16 he says that when the Holy Spirit comes he will convict the world concerning sin because they have not believed in Jesus. Among all the sins that could possibly be listed, Jesus singles out this one: Sin is not believing in Jesus.

Why is this sin singled out? It's because it's the sin against the Gospel. Without Jesus's work as Lord and King things don't change. Lying, cheating, meanness, trickery, manipulation, abuse, anger, and so on continue to be the best ways to get ahead. The strong will get stronger. The weak will get weaker. The first will be first and the last will be last. And the one who sits atop this slag heap of lovelessness is the devil himself, whom Paul calls "**the prince of this world.**"

Unbelief in Jesus is the desire—whether that desire be conscious or unconscious—unbelief in Jesus is the desire to have the devil rule with all his works and with all his ways. That's why unbelief in Jesus is singled out as *the* sin. It is the profoundest rejection of God.

On the other hand, faith in Jesus is everything. Faith in Jesus means that you accept God's will that his Son should reign and rule instead of the devil. Jesus should reign and rule instead of any other gods or any other powers or principalities. Faith in Jesus means that you believe that you will be blessed by him instead of being blessed in any other way.

Our Gospel reading lays these things out nicely. Our Gospel reading describes Jesus meeting his disciples after he had risen from the dead. Jesus told them how all of what had happened and all of what will happen is God's will as it was foretold in the Old Testament. The Old Testament spoke about how the seed of the woman would crush the serpent's head. When God made his promises to Abraham he told

him that he would be the father of kings, and that all the world would be blessed through his seed. God promised King David that his kingdom would endure forever.

God made his promises through the prophets. Isaiah speaks about how this king would suffer and die, but that he would be a blessing. Jeremiah speaks about the new hearts that the king would bring. Ezekiel speaks about this king leading his people to good grazing land. Daniel speaks about how this king would be greater than all the greatest kingdoms of the world.

These prophecies—and there are many, many more—are fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the Christ. He died and rose according to the Scriptures. Repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations.

This last part of what Jesus is doing as king is still going on. Jesus continues to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins through his Christians who speak his word. We live now in this time when repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed by us.

The message is simple. “To repent” means “to change your mind.” People have all kinds of ideas about how to get ahead in life, how to have a good time, how to maximize their pleasure and minimize their pain. We Christians are to be helpful by advising our fellow human beings to change their minds. Nobody is blessed by breaking God’s commandments. Nobody is blessed by ignoring Jesus’s teachings. Jesus is king. He sets things right. Repent. Change your mind.

And, Jesus says, “You are forgiven.” There isn’t a single one of us who hasn’t been tricked into believing that we would be better blessed by breaking God’s commandments instead of keeping them. None of us have loved God the way Jesus teaches that we should. None of us have prayed the way we should. None of us have treated our fellow human beings the way we should. Jesus’s proclamation of forgiveness tells us that he does not reject us. He accepts us.

Jesus tells the disciples that they are to proclaim this simple message, and it is amazing to think of how the Gospel has spanned time and distance to reach our ears today. Jesus spoke. The disciples believed. Since they believed, they spoke to others. Those others believed, and they spoke. So on and so forth the Gospel has gone around the world. There are people who believe in Jesus here in Fairmont. There are people who believe in Jesus in China, India, and Iceland. What Jesus said is being fulfilled: **“Repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”**

On the other hand, there are also places where the Gospel was, but is no more. Northern Africa and the Middle East used to be predominantly Christian. It has not been predominantly Christian for over a thousand years. Europe is largely non-Christian. America seems to be following the same trend. How far behind is Fairmont?

Some people believe that this decrease in the number of people who believe in Jesus is inevitable. That is wrong. There is nothing inevitable about it whatsoever. The only way that it could be inevitable is if the Gospel is not true. If the Gospel is not true, then we are slaves to the powers and forces that are over us and are way too powerful than us. If the Gospel is not true, then evil is the way to get ahead.

Oppress whomever you can. Squeeze whomever you can. You've got to get to the top of that slag heap, and you're not going to get there by being nice. If the Gospel is not true, then this dog-eat-dog world is all there is. I admit that many believe this to be how things are, but they are wrong!

The Gospel is true. Jesus is God's Son. He won. He sits at the right hand of God the Father. He is bringing an end to evil, and creating righteousness and life. The slaves are set free. The former slaves are even children of God.

These truths must be proclaimed, however, in order for them to be believed. Faith comes through hearing. In order for there to be any hearing there has to be speaking. For God's promises to be believed, God's promises must be spoken. This is where we come in.

I began today by speaking about how difficult it can be to talk about God. I don't have a magic wand or some magic words to make it less difficult. It's difficult because there are powers and principalities and principles that want to keep their superiority. They don't want to hear anything about a king who sets their slaves free. They want their slaves to believe that there is no way out, so we should all just accept our chains as inevitable. They all preach basically the same thing: Life is the way it is, so you better just get used to it.

No. Jesus lives! If you think you're stuck because some evil's got you by the throat, then change your mind! Repent! It isn't true. Jesus reigns! All powers and authorities must give way to Jesus. When you believe in Jesus everything must turn out right in the end. You might have to go through some very difficult and painful stuff in the meantime, but your faith in Jesus will not disappoint you. You will triumph because Jesus has triumphed. This is good news.

Do not be ashamed of the Gospel, for the Gospel is the power of salvation for all who believe.