

Our Gospel Debt

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[0:00] This morning, before I have you turn to a Bible text, we'll get to that in just a moment.

I want to share a personal word to you. Actually, not just personal. I mean, it is personal, but pastoral.

So, I want to speak to you this morning to begin with, pastoral way. And I want to begin by saying to you, and I mean this with all my heart, thank you for calling me to be your pastor.

I really mean that. Thank you. I enjoy being your pastor. Well, thank you. It wasn't a pause.

I'm going to preach too long, like I always do. But, yeah, I heard that testimony over there.

[1:08] But, thank you. And thank you for loving me and loving my family. And you do that in so many different ways. You really do. And do that corporately.

As a church, we just really do sense your love for us and support of us. And many of you individually have done so much for us.

And I just want to take the opportunity to thank you. Now, there's a reason why I'm sharing this with you. It's on my heart. But, I just am thankful, thankful that you support my ministry and my ministry here.

God has graciously placed me here and that you follow my leadership. I'm thankful for that. Now, I'm really not a, I guess what some have called a big picture person, whatever that means.

I'm really not. I'm not one of these visionaries, you know. A visionary kind of leader.

[2:16] I'm not. I'm certainly not a charismatic kind of leader. I don't mean charismatic in the, well, I mean a charismatic leader. I'm just not that.

I'm more subdued, more, I don't know how to describe it. I'm just not like that. And I'm not a big promoter. Though maybe some of you think that I am or I try to be.

I'm a preacher. A preacher and a teacher of God's Word. And that's my heartbeat. And that's where I find my comfort zone without a doubt. Now, let me say this also.

And again, I'm just speaking pastorally. Kind of using that as my introduction for the text that we're going to be looking at. I want to say to you that I have been gratified to see God richly bless our church during the three years, nearly three years that I've been your pastor.

It's very gratifying to me, blessing to me. God has graciously allowed me to be your pastor. And you've graciously allowed me to be your pastor. And we have together seen God do some wonderful things and to bless us.

[3:24] Though honestly, when I started my ministry here, I was not really sure. Somebody answered it.

I was not really sure how things were going to work out. Just honestly. Three years ago, Highland Park, and I think you would agree with me, Highland Park was a wounded church.

Very wounded. Hurting. Disillusioned. Discouraged. Having lost a good many members.

That's just kind of where we were. Where I think I found you. Three years ago, you found me. I think Highland Park was kind of teetering on the edge of, I don't really know what.

I don't think anybody else here knows exactly what. I remember that persistent, whoever it is trying to call, better answer that call.

[4:35] Uh-oh. I remember that Sunday night when you voted whether to call me to be your pastor. I'm just speaking personally.

This is pastoral. I remember Sherry and Jonathan and I were sitting around the table down in the multipurpose room, just down here on the first floor.

And we were waiting on the outcome of the vote. And while we waited, unknown to us at the time, there was trouble in this very room.

And a small group wanted someone else to be the pastor. Do you remember?

As a result, the final vote was confusing. It was troubling. Certainly troubling to me.

[5:35] I think it was troubling to you. A majority in favor, yes. Yeah, but not the kind of majority that you want. Not certainly the one I wanted. There was a significant schism in this church.

Now hang on with me here. There's a reason for me sharing this, okay? I'll never forget the looks on the faces of your pastor search team when they met with us right after the vote to share with us the results.

And it was like someone had knocked the wind out of them. I know because that's the way I felt at the time. One of the team members said to me in so many words, and I don't know that I could quote verbatim, but said to us, Brother Don, if you don't come, our church is done.

I want you to know that I didn't believe that. I really didn't believe that. God was not about to let this church close its doors. Okay. What he meant was, I believe, that a number of people were seriously thinking about leaving this church three years ago.

It was a critical time in the life of this church. Without a doubt. Well, it did come, of course, and those who might have been thinking about leaving did not leave.

[7:14] Thank the Lord. And you're still here. Thank you. And Highland Park has continued, hasn't it? And continues today. And continues healthier and more unified than it has been for a long time.

It's my observation. Not because of me, but because of the grace of God. Because of His faithfulness.

Because of His goodness. Because of His plan. His plan for Highland Park Baptist Church. Plan that really is still just kind of unfolding for us.

Not only the plan, that part of it we know, but even beyond that, what we don't know. God gave you a reason to love your church again.

To be excited about your church. God gave you a pastor, and I just happen to be the blessed one to come along. I gave you a pastor to love and to support.

[8:27] God gave you a renewed love for each other. This is Highland Park Baptist Church. Church that's a family that loves one another.

God gave you a reason to do that again. God gave you something you needed. You needed a restoration of peace and unity as a body, as a family.

And I would add to that, you needed a reason, maybe even a gentle push, to get back to what you're supposed to be doing as a church. We kind of lost sight of that for a while.

Then after years, you pastor, we had a high hurdle to jump together. And it was not an easy one, a difficult and volatile staff issue.

Praise the Lord. God brought us through that. We jumped it together. Together. And we lost a handful of people.

[9:34] It grieves me still. But we emerged out of that ordeal more unified than ever before. Right?

And here we are today. The shackles of debt have been removed. Finally removed.

Praise the Lord. We started 2013 debt-free. Ten years ago, or for ten years, you've been sacrificing and giving willingly to pay off nearly two million dollars of debt with interest.

That's a lot. Forward in faith is what we called it. And last October, your elders challenged us to pay off that debt by March 3rd of 2013.

And we kind of called it debt-free by March 3. Wow. Well, by the end of December, it was done.

[10:53] It was done. Paid off. Paid off. And with over \$7,000 to spare. Praise the Lord.

And someone might on the outside be thinking, well, you probably, you know, didn't give to some other things so you can kind of pool your resources. And yet, I would say to you that in the same month, you gave more than \$2,000 over our goal for Lottie Moon missions at the same time.

And not only that, but gave toward our budget far exceeding what we needed for even the month of December. And not only that, but I can speak for our staff.

You graciously, lovingly, gave your staff a love offering that was beyond anything we would have ever expected.

Looking at the entire year of 2012 in terms of tithing and offering, we exceeded our budget when everything is in for December.

[12:18] We will have exceeded our budget by very likely more than \$60,000. And that's not counting, of course.

Now get this, \$166,000 you gave to the building fund to pay off our debt in 2013.

12, rather. Now what does all that say to us? Exactly. Can you read my notes?

That God is good. That's what it ought to say to us. That God is faithful. God is faithful even when we're not always.

God is faithful. God established this church. God has a plan for this church.

[13 : 27] God is faithful. God is good. And it also tells me that His people are obedient and faithful. Faithful.

Giving to the Lord. Giving to His church. That's just one aspect of that. I know I'm talking about money here. Many, many other things.

It's a sign of God's faithfulness. A testimony to His faithfulness. It's also a testimony to the spiritual health of a church. Again, not the only measurement of that.

Not the only indication of that. But, certainly, it is one. A church that gives, supports, missions, supports the work of the church, gives in love to their staff.

It's the sign of a healthy church. church. So, now what? Now what?

[14 : 37] I mean, where do we go from here? As you pastor, I think we need a little help with our perspective on all of it.

I think we need maybe some help on our priorities going forward. not that our priorities are necessarily wrong, but a big part of our priority toward a certain thing that needed to be done is now over.

And, what about priorities going forward? That is to say, for ten years we have had to commit a good bit of our resources to a building debt.

And, it's been a burden. it really has. But, we've had to do that. And, now praise God, we are free from that debt, but there is another kind of debt that we have as a church.

This is where this is all leading, okay? We have another kind of debt. It's one that we must never lose sight of. And, I would say to you, it is one that if we're not careful, we always risk losing sight of.

[15 : 57] And, it is a debt that defines us as a people. As a people called Highland Park Baptist Church. It really is a debt that defines each of us individually as born again, disciples and followers of Christ.

it's a debt that explains the reason for our existence as a church. Explains that. Why we're here. Why God planted us and put us here and grew us and so forth. It explains our reason for our existence. It's a debt that we should welcome. You don't normally have the word welcome in the same sentence with the word debt.

We don't always welcome debt. and in nearly every other way we shouldn't welcome debt. But, this is a debt that we welcome. It's a debt that we are eager to pay toward.

Even though, it is a debt that we can never pay off. that is until Jesus comes. And I will say this, it is a debt that everything we have as a church, everything, it's a debt that everything we have as a church should focus on paying.

[17 : 16] Every ministry that we have as a church, from ministries to children to youth to young adults to adults, every ministry, ministry.

It is a debt that we should focus on paying through our budget giving every week. Our personal efforts as a teacher, if you're a teacher or a leader or a worker or someone who's serving in some capacity or another, that's part of the paying off of this or paying toward of this debt.

The various missions, endeavors that we have as a church, here and abroad, this building, this building and its property, the property it sits on, is a part of that.

And we've got to take care of this building. We're stewards of this building that God has given to us. It's a huge resource for, to be directed toward paying toward this debt that we have.

It is an equipping station. This room and every room in this building is an equipping station or we could call it a base of operation.

[18 : 39] It is a tool of evangelism. This building is. It's important. We've got to take care of it. All of that and many more things that I can mention.

All of these assets and things, both tangible and intangible, we should be marshaled toward the pain toward the debt that we have.

Now, by now, I think you've guessed what the debt is. This debt that we're willing to pay toward, but a debt that we can never pay off, a debt that defines us, who we are, and a debt that we are now free to give more attention to.

That is, our gospel debt. Our gospel debt. Now, the Apostle Paul tells us something about that, and so take your Bibles this morning and open them to Romans chapter 1, find verse 14.

We covered this ground a long time ago. In fact, not long after I came to be your pastors, I started preaching through the book of Romans, and I know it's nearly three years and I'm not done with Romans, but we're kind of backtracking.

[19:57] I want you to look at this passage in Romans chapter 1, starting with verse 14. Paul said, I am a debtor, both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and unwise.

So as much as is in me, I'm ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith as it is written, the just shall live by faith. faith. All right?

Now, I'm going to, this morning, with this introduction, don't lose sight of it because it ties in with that, but I'm going to kind of approach this text from, I guess we would call it a little bit of an unorthodox way.

And that is to say that I'm going to start at the end of it and work my way back to the start of it, which is a little bit different, but there is a method to my madness. For one thing, grammatically speaking, this would be permissible because of a series of coordinating conjunctions.

[21:22] But never mind about that. That's not the reason why I want to start at the end and go back to the beginning. I'm going to do it this way because I want to begin with the most important, most significant truth in this text.

I want to begin with what the text has to say in verses 16 and 17 about the gospel. About the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Because you see, at the beginning of this particular block of verses that I've chosen, in verses 14 and 15, these verses give us a window into Paul's heart and ministry.

They reveal to us what energized him, what animated him in his ministry. These verses reveal to us why Paul was, not arguably, without any doubt, the most effective and the greatest missionary who ever lived.

These verses reveal that to us and explain that to us. Namely, that Paul considered himself, verse 14, a debtor and that Paul also was always eager to, verse 15, pay that debt.

[22:39] Pay toward that debt. A debtor and eager to pay it. That's who Paul was. And that's what it explains to us and helps us understand why Paul was who he was and as great a missionary as he was.

And we can learn much from Paul. Not only individually, but certainly as a church. And that is my focus here this morning. thing. We, the people of Highland Park Baptist Church, we can learn much from Paul.

Something I think that would help us give us the right perspective on the ministry of our church. And help us to, and guide us into setting proper priorities as a church.

Now let's look at the text. Starting with kind of the last few verses and then we'll move backward.

We'll move back to the beginning of it. Verse 16. And just follow along.

We're going to kind of walk through the text. I don't have point one, two, or three. We're just going to walk through this text. Albeit backward. Okay? Paul said in verse 16, For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

[24:00] That's an incredible statement. And it's significant. In fact, it's kind of strange that he would say it and word it just this way.

The implication being that Paul at one time, or maybe at certain times, was tempted to be ashamed of it. You say, the apostle Paul?

Yeah. Yeah. I think that's what he's admitting here. Or that's the implication. That at some times, he was tempted to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

James Stewart, the great Scottish preacher, he noted this. He said, There is no sense in declaring that you're not ashamed of something unless you've been tempted to feel ashamed of it.

I think we can all relate to that. That we have been tempted, and maybe even more than tempted, to be ashamed of the gospel to the point of being silent about it.

[24:57] Paul knew this temptation. I think that's what we ought to get from this kind of the opening words of verse 16. Paul knew this temptation, and so do we.

He knew that the message of the cross was foolishness to some, and it was a stumbling block to many. He knew that whenever and wherever the gospel is preached and proclaimed and taught

and lived out, it arouses opposition.

Every time, everywhere, it arouses opposition, even violent at times. And he knew that every time the gospel is proclaimed, it induces contempt in the hearts of many.

And he knew that at the very least, it would provoke and does provoke ridicule. Now, how did Paul, and how shall we, overcome the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ?

Well, simple. Remember the two truths Paul mentions next. We're just walking through the text. He mentions two things. Two cures for being ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 20] Christ. First, the gospel, Paul said, look at it, is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first, and also for the Greek, meaning everyone.

It's kind of redundant. For everyone who believes, that means Jews and Greeks, that means everyone. It is the power of God. That is this same gospel message that is hated and rejected and blasted and opposed and the preaching of it outlawed in many places in the world.

This same gospel that is ridiculed, Paul said, is the power of God to save. That's an incredible statement. This is what Paul knew about the gospel.

It's the power of God to save. And listen, how do we know this? How do we know this? Well, we know it personally for one thing.

Or, I hope you do. I mean, just think about it. Has God reconciled us to Himself through Christ? Has God forgiven us all our sins?

[27 : 32] Has God made us, adopted us into His beloved family as His children? Has God put His Holy Spirit in us to indwell us?

Has God placed us in His unique community of faith that is the church? Do we not personally know the power of the gospel to save?

The answer is yes. then how could we possibly be ashamed of it? Do you see? Now listen, there's a second reason why we, all of us, every one of us who name the name of Christ, why all should know that the gospel is the power of God to save.

We know it personally, but we also know it practically. Or we should. Or there's certainly opportunity to know it practically. This gets into the realm of actually doing ministry and actually proclaiming the gospel.

We know it is the power of God practically. Because, see, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ always results in salvation to those who believe it.

[28 : 46] That's a good place for amen. That's a good place for an amen. Alright. Proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ always results in salvation for those who believe it.

And the more we proclaim it, the more we observe and witness people believing it. I don't think you got it. That's the power of the gospel.

That we know practically. Even though it is opposed by many, you might even argue most. And not just simply opposed, but outwardly rejected.

Even though it is still the power of God to save those who believe it. And the more it is proclaimed, the more we will witness people believing it. Paul preached the gospel in Jerusalem, the religious center of the world, and he was mobbed by an angry crowd, but some believed it.

Paul preached the gospel in Athens, arguably the intellectual power or center of the world, and they mocked him, yet some believed it.

[30 : 06] And Paul preached the gospel in Rome, the political center of the world, and he was martyred. God, yet many believed it.

Do you see the power of God to salvation to those who believe? Regardless of the opposition, see, here's what we should know about the gospel.

Regardless of the opposition, and even the measure, and what that opposition looks like, and how it manifests itself, regardless of the opposition, we are assured of success.

Have you ever thought about it in those terms? Not assured success because the way we preach it or proclaim it or explain it, but we're assured of success because of the very nature of it.

The gospel is the power of God. The gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes. How then could we be ashamed of it?

[31 : 10] So, how did Paul and how shall we overcome the temptation to be ashamed of the gospel of Christ? Well, remember these two truths that Paul mentions in the text.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation for all who believe. That's the first truth. The second truth, verse 17, for in it, it being the gospel, in it what?

The righteousness of God is revealed. That is, when the gospel is proclaimed, faithfully proclaimed to unbelievers, some will believe it and respond to it.

And God then reveals in that whole thing, He reveals His righteousness righteousness by saving the believer. But more than that, a whole lot more than that, by also declaring that believer righteous before Him.

Declaring that believer right, just, as though He had never sinned against God. Never disobeyed Him.

[32 : 33] Declared Him righteous. And by declaring Him righteous before Him, He is actually granting a standing, an eternal standing of that believer, a position before God of righteousness, of justification.

He actually credits, imputes His righteousness to the believer. This is an incredible doctrine. Incredible thing about the gospel.

Paul goes on from faith to faith. Maybe a bit of a confusing phrase, a number of different takes on it, but I believe it means from faith, initially salvation, to greater degrees of faith.

Not more salvation, but sanctification. Becoming more and more like Christ. We are saved by grace through faith. And then we continue on in faith.

That's why He said, as it is written, the just shall live by faith. Those who have been made righteous by a gracious God, just before Him, live, always live, and continue to live always by faith.

[33 : 56] Now, that's what Paul believed about the gospel. That's an incredible thing. And so, he was unashamed of it. Unashamed of it.

That made, see, that made Paul who he was in Christ. That made Paul who he was as one of his people, one of his ministers, one of his missionaries.

That is what energized Paul, energized and animated his ministry. What he knew about the gospel. And how did Paul describe that? Let's take a step, not forward, but backward in the text.

And see how Paul's belief about the gospel shaped him, formed him, and therefore, how we, how we are shaped by it, formed.

Not only we in the sense of each of us individually, but we as a church. First of all, what Paul believed about the gospel explains how Paul could say, without hesitation, regardless of the dangers, the opposition, regardless of who would be opposed to the gospel that he preached, Paul could say, without hesitation, temptation, I am eager to proclaim it.

[35 : 25] Eager to proclaim it. Look at verse 15. So as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also.

That's how it reads in the New King James. The word translated ready is translated in nearly every other version of the Bible is translated eager.

If you have other translations, you probably see that. And I think that's right. Even though I would tell you that even the word eager is not quite strong enough really to translate the Greek here.

The word here is prathumos. Thumos. And the root of that word is thumos. Which, when it stands alone in Scripture, it means anger, wrath.

You say, well, Paul wasn't angry. There wasn't wrath involved here. No, no, no. But when you put it with the preposition here and the way it's used here, the idea is intense feeling.

[36 : 34] We could substitute it with the word passionate. Paul could have been saying and was saying, I'm passionate to share this gospel, to proclaim this gospel.

An intense feeling. So you see, it's more than just ready. It's eager. Paul was eager and even that doesn't do justice, does it?

Eager, he said, to preach the gospel to you, he said, who are in Rome also. Don't miss that word. You know what that means? What it implies? It means that Paul was eager, he was passionate to proclaim the gospel everywhere. Everywhere.

To Rome also. That is everywhere and to the world as best he could, as far as he could go. And Paul did that.

[37 : 36] Preached the gospel to the known world of his day. He did that and so must we. Dear people, let's take one more step backward in the text and see how Paul's belief about the gospel shaped him, formed him, and therefore how it should shape us, form us as a church.

Paul said, because of what I know and believe about the gospel, that it is the power of God to salvation, to save, and that when it is proclaimed, God's righteousness is revealed.

Because I know that about the gospel, I am eager to proclaim it, and because I believe these truths about the gospel, this is what Paul is saying, because I believe these truths about the gospel, I am a debtor.

A debtor to everyone. A debtor specifically to everyone who has not yet heard its message, and everyone who has not yet believed it.

That's what he's saying. He said, I'm a debtor. To whom? Everyone.

[38:56] Everyone. Everyone. And then he explains that, he qualifies that, or quantifies it in some sense, both to Greeks and to barbarians.

Translation, to the civilized and the uncivilized. To Greek speakers and those of every other tongue, every other language.

That's where the word barbarian comes from. It's an onomatopoeia. That is, it sounds like it. You hear someone who doesn't speak your language with Russian or Chinese and it just sounds like gibberish.

It's blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And then he goes a step further, both to the wise and to the unwise, the educated and the uneducated.

That is, the sophisticated and the common. We could say the wealthy and the poor and so forth.

That is, the point is, whoever they are and wherever they live, Paul said, I'm a debtor, in this sense, to every tribe and tongue and people and nation because it is God's gracious plan to redeem His people out of every tribe, every tongue, every people, every nation on the earth and therefore we must go there and proclaim the gospel there.

[40:20] He said, I have a debt I am eager to pay toward but I have a debt that will never ever be paid off until Jesus comes.

Now church, here is what I want us to get though I could apply this in so many ways. We have just finished paying our building debt.

Praise the Lord. The note was held by the Baptist Foundation. Worthy organization to hold the note because all the interest we paid went to Baptist causes in our state and in our convention.

So they held the note the Baptist Foundation and at the appointed time we're going to have a great celebration and burn that note. I can't wait till that day.

We'll talk about that later. That said, let me ask you something. Very serious question. Who holds the note on our gospel debt?

[41:40] You say, it must be God. Well, in one sense, you're right. For saving us, we owe him an eternal debt, a debt we can never pay.

It's a debt we can't even begin to pay. It's a debt God requires no payment. Well, not now because it's all been paid. See, that's not what Paul's talking.

Let me tell you who holds the note on our gospel debt. It's the city of Bartlesville and Dewey. the people who live in this state, our country, our world. Be specific. We could add to that the thousands of people who seek help from the Salvation Army.

That we have committed as a church to help and to support and want to help and support in greater ways. They hold the note on our gospel debt.

[42:59] People in Bartlesville that we seek to reach with every ministry in our church. You say, you keep talking about missions, Pastor, what about Bartlesville?

Well, everything we do as a church is part of that mission. Everything Chris does down with you. All of our children's ministries, Awana, BBS, Sunday School, all of our ministries, our grow ministry.

All that is to go toward paying the debt, a debt that we owe. And the note is held by the people of Bartlesville. We can go further than that and say the men incarcerated at the Dick Connor Correctional Facility hold the note on our debt.

And every month, the third Friday of the month, your team, your prison ministry team, go and share the love of Christ and the gospel of Christ with those men.

Some, I guess all collectively, well over a hundred men. every month hear the gospel. They hold the note on our debt that we must pay.

[44:28] The people in Colorado Springs that we have committed to partner with and to the churches there to help them, support them, to share the gospel there.

They hold the note. We have to pay it. the people living in Ukraine, the people living in the darkness of communist China, and many others we could mention.

The people living in obscure places in the world, places you've never heard of, people you've never heard of, who do not even have a copy of the Bible in their own language.

marriage. The martyred pastors in specific places in this world who need our support so that they can share the gospel to the lost people in their world.

They hold the note. Now, they don't know it. They're not going to call us or send us a payment overdue notice. They don't know it, but they hold the note on our gospel debt.

[45 : 51] And it is a debt that we must pay. And it is a debt, of course, we will never pay off. How do we pay it? In a host of ways.

In a multiplicity of ways. We're paying for it right now. And my vision is that we go a step further. That will be our discussion here tonight, but here's a clue.

You were willing and faithful to give of your money to the tune of \$166,000 in 2012 to pay for a building that perishes with the use.

What are you willing to give now to greatly increase the payments on our gospel debt? That's the question I put to you.

And to be like Paul, eager to pay it.