

SERMON NOTES
II Kings 5:1-27; Acts 15:8-11; 16:29-34
“The Offense of a Simple Gospel”

Intro:

- The most basic and important message of the NT is: *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*
- **Why is that simple message so controversial – and so offensive to many non-Christians and so hard for Christians to practice consistently?**
- *The message is offensive to adherents of Tolerance & Pluralism & Relativism & Universalism because it teaches that salvation is through Christ alone*
- *The message is offensive to human pride because it does not require or allow for human achievement or goodness to play any part in our salvation*
- *The message is offensive to human pride because it declares that good people and bad people alike are sinners in need of being saved by Someone Else’s work and merits*
- *The message is offensive to human pride because it puts all people in the same boat of not being good enough to earn eternal life in heaven by our own good works or religious performance*
- *The message is hard for Christians to practice because it requires us to accept people with defective doctrinal beliefs or lifestyles and differing convictions on the sole basis of their faith in Jesus Christ*
- *The message is hard for Christians to practice because we can never get to the place of earning God’s favor or looking down on others by virtue of our superior righteousness*
- **Rev. Albert Mohler of the Southern Baptist Convention was interviewed on the Phil Donahue show**
- *This question by Phil Donahue gets right to the heart of the offense of the Gospel:*
- **Donahue: So if a Nazi killed a Jew, a good Jew, a practicing Jew, the Jew goes to hell, but the Nazi still has a chance to get to heaven. That would be the consequence of your position, Dr. Mohler.**

- On that point, Phil Donahue is correct: If a murderer repents and believes in the Lord Jesus, he will be cleansed of his sins and be saved and go to heaven
- *But if a good Jew – or a good Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu – does not believe in the Lord Jesus, he will die in his sins and go to hell*
- Sounds unfair to the natural man, doesn't it?
- *The Gospel offends the natural man's sense of fairness as well as his pride*

- Here are the assumptions underlying Phil Donahue's and many other people's conviction that the Christian Gospel is not only unfair but actually repulsive and evil and deserving of scorn and contempt:
- *Most people are good people who deserve to go to heaven. Maybe there needs to be a place like hell for Nazi murderers and terrorists and child molesters – but most of us good people who only commit innocent sins such as lying and profanity and drunkenness and sexual immorality and cheating on our taxes and broken wedding vows and prejudice and temper tantrums and envy and greed and selfishness – we deserve to go to heaven*
- If God is any kind of nice, loving, forgiving God at all – He should give all of us good people who commit only innocent sins a free pass on our sins and just focus on our good qualities and good deeds and consider Himself blessed to enjoy our presence for all eternity in heaven
- *And if God is any kind of reasonable God at all – He should accept whatever kind of worship is offered to whatever kind of god or gods and receive all religious people of any religious faith into heaven*
- Any religion that teaches that a nice guy like Phil Donahue is not going to heaven is an intolerant and judgmental religion – *and any religion that teaches that a really bad sinner like a Nazi or a murderer can go to heaven just by believing in Jesus is an evil religion*

- Here was Dr. Mohler's response: *The gospel is for all of us, for the Jews first and then for the Gentiles. The Scripture tells us the hard truth that all have sinned, not just the worst of us. And that Nazi guard is going to be punished for his sin, and it will be judged as sin. His only hope would be the grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. And the profound truth of the gospel is that salvation can come to any person who comes in faith to Christ – including both the Jew who was killed and the guard who did the killing... All persons are sinners in need of a Savior. Jesus Christ is the only Savior. Salvation is found in Jesus Christ alone, through faith in him."*

- *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved*
- Such a simple message – and yet – OH... how controversial and offensive to many

- The OT account of Naaman's healing from leprosy illustrates why a simple gospel is so offensive to many

I. NAAMAN CLEANSED BY GRACE THROUGH HUMBLE OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD OF GOD

- Naaman was the field marshal general of the king of Aram
- *He was the Joab or General Eisenhower or MacArthur or Petraeus of Aram*
- He was famous and revered for his valor and military victories
- *He was also a leper*
- Presumably his form of leprosy or skin disease was not so severe as to be disfiguring or disabling to the point of disqualifying him from attaining to such a lofty position in the King's court
- *But it was a serious condition nonetheless*
- Though Aram had an official peace treaty with Israel, Naaman had been conducting raids in the border territory of Israel, and during one of these campaigns, a young Israeli girl had been taken captive and had been made a servant in his household
- *This vulnerable servant girl became the means by which this great man was cured of his leprosy*
- At a time of serious apostasy in the land of Israel – and in the midst of the idolatrous Arameans – this captive servant girl believed the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was able to cure Naaman of his leprosy
- *She suggested to Naaman's wife that Naaman should go to see the prophet of Yahweh in Israel's capital city of Samaria in order to be cured*
- When Naaman heard of this hope for a cure, he went to the King of Aram and received permission to go to the land of Israel
- *The Aramean King sent a letter to Joram, King of Israel – and enough money to buy the whole city of Samaria – requesting healing for Naaman – assuming that Israel's prophet was subject to Israel's king and that Israel's king would then order the prophet to cure Naaman*
- *But King Joram of Israel interpreted the letter to mean that he himself should cure Naaman of his leprosy – and that if he didn't – the Arameans would retaliate against Israel*

- *Joram himself was a follower of the pagan god, Baal, not the one true and living God – Yahweh – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – but he knew that only Yahweh had the power to cure a man of leprosy*
- *Are all religions and all religious faiths the same? Not then and not now*
- *There is only one Creator God who is mighty to save*
- **When Elisha, the prophet of the one true and living God, heard about Joram's distress – he rebuked Joram's lack of faith and told Joram to send the Aramean General to him**
- **Naaman approached Elisha's house with great pomp and circumstance befitting a Very Important Person**
- *This proud pagan assumed he could command the healing by his wealth and his lordly status*
- **Elisha the prophet was not impressed by Naaman's show of wealth and power and status**
- *The power of God to heal and to save could not be bought*
- *Elisha did not even come out of his house to meet Naaman face-to-face*
- *Instead he sent a message to Naaman via a servant: Go wash yourself seven times in the River Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed*
- **Naaman felt disrespected, insulted and humiliated – and was infuriated at this command**
- *Naaman expected to be treated with great respect by this prophet in recognition of his greatness*
- **Naaman expected that the prophet would come out and personally pray for him and lay hands on him – calling on the name of his God**
- *Why should he come all the way to Israel just to wash himself in the crummy little muddy Jordan River when there was a much better and cleaner river right in Damascus where he lived?*
- **As a great man, Naaman expected that his healing would involve some kind of great thing that he would do or that the prophet would do**
- *There was nothing great about washing in the Jordan River seven times*
- *Why, even a child or a lowly servant could do that*

- Such a simple message: *Go, wash yourself 7 times in the Jordan River, and you will be clean*
- **Yet Naaman was offended – offended by its very simplicity**
- Naaman was expecting that the prophet Elisha would display some impressive magical prayers in healing him
- *Or perhaps Elisha would require Naaman to do some heroic feat to prove himself worthy of being healed*
- Once again God used servants to convey His grace to this proud man

2 Kings 5:13 - 14 (NIV) ¹³Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” ¹⁴So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

- *Did Naaman have faith to believe that he would be healed if he washed in the Jordan?*
- He had enough faith to be willing to follow instructions and do what he was told
- *In his case, it’s hard to distinguish humility from faith from obedience*
- Why did Elisha not make a fuss over this great man?
- *To humble Naaman*
- Why no great spiritual performance by Elisha and no great act of piety or heroism by Naaman?
- *To show Naaman that God was acting in grace – not in response to anything Naaman was or had done – nor even anything that Elisha was or was doing*
- Why the River Jordan rather than one of the better, cleaner rivers of Syria?
- *To show that Naaman was being healed by God – not by sacred water – and not by the magical powers of a prophet*
- All Naaman had to do was humble himself and follow simple instructions – God would do the rest
- **God opposes the proud – but gives grace to the humble**
- Naaman got the point – he was healed by God – *not by his own greatness or his own actions // not by the river // not by the magical powers of the prophet*

2 Kings 5:15 (NIV) ¹⁵Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.”

- *The God of Israel is also the God of the nations – Yahweh is the one and only true and living God*
- *All gods and all religions are not the same – Yahweh is mighty to save – Baal is not – in fact, Baal is no god at all*
- In gratitude for the healing and new life, Naaman wanted to give a generous gift to the prophet Elisha
- *Elisha refused the gift*
- Grace granted by God cannot be rewarded with material benefits
- *The grace of God cannot be bought – and the grace of God cannot be repaid*
- *But Elisha’s servant, Gehazi, could not let all that wealth just walk away*
- After all, Naaman was only an Aramean – a pagan Gentile – the least he could do would be to leave some generous gifts for an Israelite prophet
- *Gehazi could not accept his master Elisha’s decision to forego the bounty*
- Gehazi chased after Naaman – and misrepresented Elisha – telling Naaman that circumstances had changed and Elisha would accept the generous gifts after all
- **Gehazi viewed Naaman as a foreigner to be exploited rather than as a fellow believer**
- *Naaman gladly gave him more than he asked*
- And Gehazi hid the loot
- *But if Gehazi thought that he could hide his sin from his master – a prophet of God – he seriously miscalculated*
- Elisha exposed the sin and pronounced the sentence: *Gehazi would be afflicted with Naaman’s leprosy*
- *God gives grace to the humble but opposes the proud and self-seeking*

II. SINNERS SAVED BY GRACE THROUGH BELIEVING IN THE LORD JESUS

- *The same day we read the story of Naaman in the One Year Bible, the NT reading dealt with the dispute among believers in the Jerusalem church as to whether or not Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the Law of Moses in order to be saved and fully accepted into God’s People*

- **Are Jews and Gentiles alike saved solely by the grace of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – or must Gentiles also follow Jewish laws and live like Jews in order to be acceptable to God?**
- *The great tendency and temptation for devout religious people is to complicate the simplicity of the Gospel and add requirements for salvation and full fellowship in the church of Christ*
- **The great temptation for believers is to cling to the conviction that there is something they can do – in addition to trusting the finished work of Christ – to earn or repay their salvation – and to insist that others do the same to prove they are included in the people of God**
- The Judaizers in Jerusalem believed that Gentiles should become Jews if they were to be true Christ-followers
- *If they had won the day, then today we Gentiles would be required to be circumcised and to follow Jewish dietary laws and other laws in order to have assurance of our salvation*
- Instead, the simple Gospel message won the day, as stated by Peter:

Acts 15:8 - 11 (NIV) ⁸God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them (gentile believers) by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. ⁹He made no distinction between us (Jews) and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? ¹¹No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

- *No one has ever been able to keep all God’s commandments – and yet all other religions in some degree teach that salvation is a matter of obedience to God’s commandments in the Law of Moses or following the Eightfold Path of Buddhism or Fulfilling the Five Pillars of Islam – all in some way teach that we find life by fulfilling God’s demands*
- If the Judaizers had won the day, Christianity would have become just one more Law-based religion that requires us to meet God’s demands in order to be saved
- *Those who believe that if we live a relatively good life, then we can win God’s acceptance into heaven – have a god that is too small and is not holy or just or loving – making no provision for our inevitable sins and shortcomings*
- But the God of the Bible is holy and just and loving
- *We justly deserve God’s wrath for breaking His Laws and rebelling against His authority and spurning His love*

- But God sent His Son to earth to live a perfect life and then to bear the punishment for our sins on the Cross
- Every single one of us is incapable of keeping a covenant based on the works of the Law – *none of us is good enough to be accepted by God on the basis of our personal righteousness*
- Our only hope is the Grace of God and the Cross of Christ whereby we are cleansed of all our sins and receive the perfect righteousness of Christ Himself by faith in Him
- *And what does God require of us to receive this gift of salvation and eternal life?*

Acts 16:30 - 31 (NIV) ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” ³¹They replied, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.”

Ephesians 2:8 - 9 (NIV) ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

John 3:16 (NIV) ¹⁶**“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

- *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you shall not perish but have eternal life*
- **Yes, it’s that simple**
- **The hard part has already been done by Jesus Christ on the Cross – it is ours but to believe and receive the salvation achieved by Jesus Christ**
- *No one in heaven will ever be able to boast that he has earned or deserves the gift of eternal life*
- **Salvation is the gift of God – paid for with the blood of Jesus Christ – ours to receive by faith**
- *So the crucial question becomes: What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus?*
- *There is more to believing in Jesus than a mental agreement that Jesus is the Son of God who died for our sins and was raised from the dead*
- *The story of Naaman illustrates the meaning of saving faith*
- *What did Naaman need to do in order to be cleansed of his leprosy and made new in his flesh?*

- (1) **Naaman needed to renounce his pride and self-reliance and status // admit his desperate need and his powerlessness to heal himself //**
 –Jesus called this becoming poor in spirit and becoming like a child
 - (2) **Naaman needed to humble himself and give up his own ideas of how the healing should take place**
 –Naaman needed to accept the authority of the prophet and the Word of God over his own ideas of how God should act to heal him
 –The Bible calls this repentance
 - (3) **Naaman needed to follow some simple instructions**
 –He needed to go to the Jordan River and dip himself in the water 7 times
 - (4) **Naaman acknowledged the God of Israel as the one and only true and living God in heaven and on earth – and pledged to worship Him as such**
- What does it mean to believe in the Lord Jesus in order to be saved?
 - (1) **You must renounce your pride and self-reliance and self-righteousness // You must admit your sin and your desperate need of a Savior // You must admit your powerlessness to save yourself by your own works or goodness**
 - **You must become poor in spirit and come to God empty-handed – renouncing all reliance upon your own goodness or good deeds**
 - (2) **You must humble yourself and give up your own ideas about how God should save you or accept you into heaven**
 - Many people have their own opinion about how God should be God and how God should accept people into heaven
 - Believing in the Lord Jesus involves acknowledging that God is God and you are not
 - We come to God on His terms, not on ours
 - Our opinions about how God should judge us or save us or admit us into heaven are irrelevant since we are not God
 - We need to accept the authority of the Word of God over our own ideas of how God should save us
 - (3) **We need to follow God’s simple instructions: namely, Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved**
 - Put your entire trust and reliance and confidence in what Jesus Christ did for you in his death and resurrection rather than trusting in your own religious or moral efforts or good deeds

–The Greek text literally says: ***Believe ON the Lord Jesus – Place the full weight of your eternal destiny and your acceptance with God on Jesus Christ and His finished work on the Cross***

–If you were to die and stand at the pearly gates and be asked: *Why should you be allowed to enter heaven?* – The answer you would give to demonstrate your faith would be: *I have placed my trust in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ to forgive my sins and make me acceptable to God*
 –*I have placed all my hope for eternal life in my Savior, Jesus Christ*
 –that is what it means to believe in the Lord Jesus to be saved

(4) We need to follow Jesus Christ as Lord

–*Accepting Christ as Savior is only the beginning of God’s saving work in our lives*

–**Salvation is free but not cheap**

–*Our salvation cost Jesus Christ His life – and following Christ on the path of eternal life will cost us our lives as well*

Luke 9:23 - 24 (NIV) ²³Then Jesus said to them all: **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.”**

- *The more of our heart and mind and will and lives we surrender to the Lordship of Christ – the more we will experience His life and power and love flowing through us to change us into His likeness and to empower us to love and serve others*
- *We experience the fullness of Christ’s life by believing in the Lord Jesus –not just once when we accept Him as our Savior – but day by day we rely on Jesus Christ to cleanse us of sin and to live His life in and through us by the indwelling Holy Spirit*
- **Our whole life is lived in union with and in dependence upon the Lord Jesus**

III. LIVING OUT THE TRUTH OF A SIMPLE GOSPEL

- ***Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved***
- **It’s easy to give mental assent to that biblical truth – but a lot harder to live out the reality of that truth on a daily basis**
- ***Two primary temptations or diversions from the truth of a simple Gospel:***

(1) Having trusted in Jesus to make us acceptable to God when we were first saved, we revert back to a life of attempting to achieve our own righteousness and earn our daily acceptance with God by our own efforts

(2) We place additional requirements and conditions upon others before accepting their faith and salvation

-We say that we believe that the only requirement for being saved is to believe in the Lord Jesus

-But in reality we have a hard time believing that some professing Christians are really saved if they believe or worship or live or vote quite differently from us

- *The Judaizers had a hard time believing that Gentiles could truly be saved if they weren't circumcised and following Jewish food laws, for example*
- *Even after it was decided at the Jerusalem Council that salvation was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ apart from following the Law of Moses – the Judaizers may have reasoned: **Yes, but surely after the Gentile believers have the Holy Spirit living in them, then they will want to live more righteous lives just like us Jews in obedience to the Word of God in the Law of Moses***
- *In other words, after they've been Christians for awhile, they will become more and more like us Jews – and if they don't – then their faith may not be genuine and their salvation may be suspect*

- *We are tempted to think the same way, are we not?*
- *Let's say someone is a pro-choice // pro-same-sex-marriage liberal Democrat when they accept Christ and first become a Christian*
- *That's fine – anyone can be saved by believing in Jesus – anyone can come to Christ just as they are to be saved – and then Christ will change them from within by His Spirit*
- *But after they've been Christians awhile, we would expect them to become more like us in our convictions about abortion and marriage and other issues*
- *And if they don't – then their faith may not be genuine and their salvation may be suspect*
- *Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved can easily become: **Believe in the Lord Jesus and become pro-life and pro-traditional marriage – and you will be saved***

- *Or suppose someone comes to Christ from a nominal Catholic background where they were not clearly taught how to enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ*
- *And they accept Jesus Christ as their Savior – and Christ begins to work some changes in their lives*

- But they still attend a Catholic church – and they still believe in the Catholic teachings on the sacraments – and they still ask Mary and the saints to pray for them
- *We expected that after they'd been Christians awhile, they would become more committed to biblical doctrines and become more – well... more like us*
- And if they don't – then their faith may not be genuine and their salvation may be suspect
- ***Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved can easily become: Believe in the Lord Jesus and become conservative evangelical Protestant in your doctrines – and you will be saved***

- Or suppose someone is in the habit of going to the pub for a few beers several nights a week before becoming a Christian – *and then accepts Christ – and some changes are evident in his life – but he continues to frequent the pubs – is he still a Christian?*
- ***Is it really just the simple Gospel Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved? – or is it really more like: Believe in the Lord Jesus and adopt our doctrinal beliefs and lifestyle convictions and political views and then you can be assured of your salvation ??***

- **On what basis does God accept us into His family and into His fellowship?**
- *Is it all because of the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus?*
- Or do we need to add something of our own righteousness or our own correct doctrinal beliefs or our own holy living or our own good works to the mix?

- Will genuine saving faith produce some godly fruit – some evidence of repentance and change – some good works of obedience – in believers?
- **YES**
- *But that fruit does not need to take the form of becoming more like us*

- **If we believe the simple Gospel, then we will live out this truth: *I am totally accepted, fully pleasing, deeply loved, completely forgiven, and empowered to live a new life in Christ – BECAUSE OF THE CROSS AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS***

- **And if we believe the simple Gospel, then we will practice this command:**

Romans 15:7 (NIV) ⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Salvation Prayer

“In Christ Alone”