



PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Paul shows the danger of neglecting the grace of God. He boldly declares here that the preaching of the Gospel is not an eternal, continuous and permanent mode of instruction, but rather a passing shower, which hastens on. What it strikes, it strikes; what it misses, it misses. It does not return, nor does it stand still. The sun and heat follow and dry it up.

—Martin Luther—

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 6:1–10

Joel 2:12–19

The prophet Joel called God's people back to a life of faithful obedience. He reminded them that their God is steadfast and merciful, something they seemed to have forgotten. Joel also made a distinction between rending our hearts and rending our garments, calling on the people not to make displays of their piety, but to actually return to faithfulness.

- Can you think of a modern equivalent to outwardly “rending our garments”?
- God's steadfast love and mercy are recurring themes throughout Scripture. How does this love and mercy relate to God's judgment of sinners?

God calls Israel back to him, so that the covenant relationship will be restored. This turning includes fasting, weeping and mourning, all of which cannot be faked even if we tried.

- What are the obstacles that keep us from returning to the Lord? Is repentance something we can accomplish on our own?
- If repentance is like a car making a U-Turn, are we the driver or are we the car? In what sense is repentance the work of the Holy Spirit in us?

Psalms 51:1–13 (14–19)

Psalms 51 is traditionally understood as David's psalm of repentance concerning his sin against Bathsheba and Uriah. But in this Psalm he says, “against you only have I sinned.” Even though David's sin resulted in Uriah's death, Bathsheba's dishonor, and their child's death, David recognized that at the center of all of his actions is sin against God.

- What does it mean to say our sins are only against God? Does that mean the harm we do to our neighbors is of no consequence?
- How is all sin a sign of our rebellion and faithlessness? In what sense does this stem from lack of trust in God?
- What is the value in acknowledging our sin before our neighbors as well as our God? Who do you go to when you have sinned?

2 Corinthians 5:20b – 6:10

Jesus is described in Scripture as being without sin. He, alone, remained faithful and righteous before God. This is an important element in our understanding of what is accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection. In 2

Corinthians, Paul says that God “made (Jesus) to be sin who knew no sin.” He became sin on behalf of his people, and in becoming it, he defeated it for all of us.

- What does it mean to claim that Christ is both sinless and sin?
- Why would Christ do this for us? To put it crassly: What does he get out of it?

Paul goes on to describe the reality of Christ's witnesses. To be a follower of Jesus is to be regularly misunderstood and misjudged by the world. The way of the cross is not impressive by worldly standards. Followers of Christ are part of a new reality that many simply do not understand.

- In 2 Corinthians 6:10, what is the “everything” we possess? Why is this not recognized by the world?

Matthew 6:1–6, 16–21

Lent can easily become a time of conspicuous piety. We wear our religion on our sleeves (or our foreheads). In Matthew, Jesus warns against such displays of piety. He points out that such acts are driven by our desire to be seen. When our focus is on appearing to be faithful, true faithfulness is hard to come by.

- What is the danger in pious behavior? Isn't displaying our faith a part of being a witness?
- How is Christ breaking through our religiosity to bring us to faith?

Instead of using prayer as a means to show off to others, Jesus encouraged his disciples to go to their “room” when they pray (v. 6). The Greek word ταμειον (ta-may-on) refers to a secret or hidden room, such as a place where one might keep valuables.

- How does Jesus' advice on prayer in verses 5–6 relate to what he says in verses 19–21 about laying up treasures on earth?
- When Jesus speaks of the “treasure” we have in heaven, is he talking about things or a person?

In this passage, Jesus addressed the motives behind pious acts. Our sin drives us to seek recognition for our good deeds. We want others to notice what good people we are and what good things we do. The result is that our motives always get mixed up. Our efforts to help our neighbor are also efforts to help ourselves.

- Can you think of any evidence that we, in practice, believe that our good works assist in our salvation?
- Why do the motives behind a good deed matter?