

## Gathered: Week 2—Truly

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### (KIDS DISMISSED SLIDE AFTER WORSHIP)

Good morning everyone. Please turn with me in your bibles to 1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

### (GATHERED SLIDE)

First want to say a big thank you to everyone who helped make our first Awana a success this year. Jerry said it was the smoothest first night of Awana he's ever been part of. That's because there were so many volunteers helping make it a success. So keep up the good work, remember we're doing this to help our kids hide God's word in their hearts.

Parents, it's definitely not too late to sign your kids up for Awana, if they would like to join, just come to the church a little before 6 next Wednesday evening.

We're in week 2 of our series called Gathered, the mission and vision of Rock Prairie. If you were out of town for Labor Day and haven't heard last week's sermon, I'd encourage you to head to our new website at [rockprairie.net](http://rockprairie.net) to take a listen.

The series is called Gathered because that's what the local church is. Our church exists because we are a people who have committed to gathering together on a regular basis under a common covenant. Without the gathering, there is no church.

And as the people of God gathered here who call ourselves Rock Prairie Church, we have a common mission, as we unveiled last week. And that mission is to make Christ known from our Neighbors to the Nations.

We believe that God has placed us here for a reason, and that we're called to reach our neighbors with the good news of the gospel. We also believe that we're called to reach the nations both by sending out our own and supporting others who are bringing the gospel to those who otherwise wouldn't have had a chance to hear.

That's why we exist as a church. That's our common goal. And our Vision, the way we want Christ to be known is Truly, Deeply and Widely.

So for the next three weeks we're going to take these things one by one to talk about what kinds of things will drive what we do around here.

### (SLIDE)

This week is Truly. We want Christ to be known Truly. The way we do that is through Christ-centered preaching and worship.

So for the rest of our time this morning we're going to talk about those two things, preaching and worship. It will look a little different this morning. The vast majority of the time on Sundays we will take a single passage of scripture and expound what it says, but every once in a while we will take a topic and ask what the Bible says about that particular topic. And that's what we're doing today.

Let's pray, and then we'll jump in:

*Father, We confess to you this morning that this week we have said things we shouldn't have said, and done things we shouldn't have done. We confess that we have sinned against you alone, and we ask for your forgiveness. We also confess right now that we believe the gospel, that in Christ our sins have been washed as white as snow. That you, and omniscient all knowing God have removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. Help us to believe that, God. May we not be a people who live in pride, downplaying the seriousness of our sin, and may we not be a people who live in shame, downplaying the totality and finality of the cross. Make us a people who humbly, thankfully, joyfully live in the freedom that Christ has purchased for us on the cross. Christ is our everything. He is our life. We praise you for that this morning. Help us to see how you call us to know you truly. Make my words clear and from you. In Jesus' name, amen.*

### (SLIDE)

## Gathered: Week 2—Truly Christ-Centered Preaching

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You might be wondering, “Why are we talking about preaching?” Isn’t that the Pastors’ job to figure out how to preach? I just come and listen. But there are a few reasons why it’s important for you to know more about preaching.

One thing I’ve found to be true since we’ve moved here is that Indiana sweet corn is everything it’s cracked up to be and more. I’ve lived in Iowa, Illinois, and Ohio and I have to say that while you can get good corn in those places, there’s nothing like Indiana sweet corn.

And I think this year we’ve tried everyone’s sweet corn who’s growing it in Tipton county. Before we moved here my knowledge of sweet corn was very minimal. I could tell if it tasted good or if it was rotten, but that was it.

But this year I’ve learned a lot! I learned about the different colors, I learned the difference in texture between early corn and late corn, I’ve learned how the soil needs to be just the right texture for planting and that a ridiculous amount of rain can really mess things up.

Now, I’m probably never going to learn about the different kinds of fertilizers and pesticides and cross-pollination and all those other things that you need to know in order to actually be a successful farmer, but I know more than I used to, and that gives me a greater appreciation for what’s on my dining room table.

It’s kind of the same for preaching. You may not ever preach a sermon—although my hope is that some in this congregation who might feel the tug to preach someday—but you are all consumers of preaching. And so there are some things that you need to know to be better sermon listeners as well as better church members.

If I’m settling for subpar grocery store sweet corn like I did for many years, that’s one thing. But if you’re settling for sub-biblical preaching, that’s another.

Learning these things will both help you in discernment if you listen to other sermons throughout the week—which is a great thing to do

by the way—as well as help you keep us accountable to make sure that we’re preaching God’s Word.

So here are 3 truths about preaching that will help you grow in how you participate in the preaching of God’s Word:

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#### 1. Preaching is a Necessary Work

In some ways, preaching is a little bit under attack in our culture recently. Some people say it’s completely outdated to have a bunch of people gather together to hear one person preach for 40 minutes.

“You expect people to sit still and listen for 40 minutes?” Or people say the preacher should be more like a discussion leader who allows others to participate and just kind of guides the conversation.

So why preach? Is it the pastor’s ego? Like the preacher is so smart and wise that other people just need to soak up his every word?

I hope not, because if so you guys are in big trouble! It’s not the wisdom of the pastor that you need. It’s the power of the Word. The Pastor’s job is to bring the word to bear on the hearts of the listeners, by making clear what it says and how it applies to our lives.

That’s why I can have so much joy and confidence in regularly stepping aside and allowing others to preach God’s Word. Because I know that whoever is in this pulpit has put in hours poring over the text that they’re preaching, they’ve spent time on their knees asking the Lord to reveal the main point of the passage and how it applies to our church.

It’s not the unique wisdom of the Pastor that you’re gathering to hear. It’s God’s Word explained and applied.

And we need that. Desperately. Week in and week out.

People who haven’t been saved desperately need to hear the word preached. Romans 1:18 says, “**The Wrath of God is revealed from**

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heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.”

The wrath of God is a real thing. And those who have not been saved stand to face the wrath of God for eternity in hell. They need to hear the truth.

Also, people who *have* been saved desperately need to be reminded of the gospel. I hope you feel this sometimes. The gospel is like a cooling, healing balm applied to the soul.

We have an enemy who is an accuser. We have an enemy who wants to derail your faith. To remind you of your unworthiness. We need to hear the gospel every week to be reminded of who we are in Christ.

Preaching is necessary because many need to be saved, and those who have been saved need to be reminded of who they are in Christ.

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## 2. Preaching is a Spiritual Work

Preaching is necessary, and preaching is Spiritual. Look back at 1 Corinthians 2.

I Corinthians 2:1-5: *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. <sup>2</sup>For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup>And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, <sup>4</sup>and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, <sup>5</sup>so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.*

When I say preaching is Spiritual, I mean that with a capital S, as in the Holy Spirit.

This is what we talked about a few weeks ago. Paul says here of his message that it's not his plausible words of wisdom, it's not his creative or captivating speech that changes hearts, it's the power of God.

He goes on in verse 12:

*<sup>12</sup>Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. <sup>13</sup>And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

We have the Spirit from God, aka the Holy Spirit, *that we might understand the things freely given us by God.*

As in, the *only* way we can understand the things of God is by the Holy Spirit.

Then he says in verse 14: *<sup>14</sup>The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.*

Without the Spirit, the things of God are folly, they're foolishness. But with the Spirit, they are the very wisdom of God.

And that's a really good question to ask yourself if you ever wonder if you have the Holy Spirit: Do I understand the things of God? Does the gospel make sense to me?

Is there a sense in which you can understand the fact that apart from Christ you were doomed to take the wrath of God, but now because of the sacrifice of the Lamb you've been forgiven and made new.

If you understand that, if you believe that, if your faith is in Christ, what Paul's saying here is *that's the* evidence of the Holy Spirit at work in your life. Because the natural person, or the person without the Spirit, does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness.

But with the Spirit, the gospel is life.

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So if you believe the Gospel, by *definition* you have the Holy Spirit. And every time you hear God's Word preached and understand it, that's evidence of him working in your life. Every time you read God's word and are encouraged, or sing a truth of God's Word and feel your Spirit lifted, that is proof that the Spirit is at Work.

Preaching at its core, is utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit.

Finally,

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### 3. Preaching is a Scriptural Work

As in, it is also utterly dependent on God's Word. The kind of preaching we practice at Rock Prairie is called Expository Preaching, which is a fancy word that basically means we try to make the main point of the text we're in the main point of the sermon.

We allow God's Word to set the agenda, we don't let the agenda determine the meaning of God's Word.

Our constitution says:

*We believe the whole of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, and all of its parts, down to the very words of the original are fully inspired by God; that the Bible is reliable in every matter it discusses; and that the Bible is the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and practice*

All of scripture is fully inspired by God and fully authoritative. And we believe it all points to Jesus. Like we said last week, the Bible is a story about Jesus ransoming a people for his own possession from every nation tribe and tongue.

So the job of the preacher is to study a passage of scripture, determine what it meant in its original context and what it means for us today, and to show the congregation how it points to Jesus.

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The great preacher Charles Simeon said, *"My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding."*

That's my goal too, and that's the goal of everyone who preaches here at Rock Prairie. To bring out of scripture what is there, and to avoid thrusting in anything that isn't there.

Like I've said before, you don't want my opinions on things. That's going to help exactly nobody. But because preaching is a Spiritual work, it means that it's a Scriptural work. And our trust isn't in the creativity or cleverness of the sermon. We trust God's Word to do the work in our hearts through the Spirit.

And that takes the pressure off of me! Because as I prepare each week, I don't need to be worried about how clever or creative my sermon is in order to win people over. My only concern as I prepare is "am I rightly explaining what the Bible says."

We want Christ to be known Truly, on his terms, for who he is. And part of how we do that is through Christ-centered Preaching, which is necessary, spiritual, and scriptural.

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### Christ Centered Worship

The second way we make Christ known Truly is through Christ-centered Worship.

When we talk about knowing Christ Truly, we're primarily talking about what takes place on Sunday morning. And that's what I'm going to mostly talk about as we talk about Worship.

Obviously, worship goes *well* beyond singing at church on Sunday. We are called to live a life of worship. That's what characterizes us as Christians, we worship the one True God.

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Even hearing the word preached is an act of worship. The reason I usually say “Let’s continue in worship” as my first words when I get up here is because the worship doesn’t stop just because the music stops.

We are called to be a worshipping people with our whole lives. And I pray that you are living worshipful lives from Monday to Saturday.

But we’re also called to sing in church. And I want to take the next few minutes to talk about that. Because it’s important.

The command to sing is either the most common or second most common command in scripture depending how you count it.

And our passage in Colossians 3 is one of the key texts when we think about singing in church. I think the NIV has the best translation here. It says,

**16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.**

Meaning, the way you go about teaching and admonishing one another is *through* singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. As we sing, we’re expressing thankfulness to God *and* we’re encouraging and teaching one another.

That’s why, it’s my firm belief that what we sing in church is critically important.

The singing isn’t just a warm up for the sermon and then a cool down when it’s over, our singing is *the means* by which we encourage and teach one another.

David and I were blessed to be able to attend a conference in Nashville a few weeks ago called the Sing! Conference. The theme of the conference was how do we help our churches be more Christ-centered in their singing.

Keith and Kristyn Getty put it on, and this is one of the things Keith said talking about the content of what we sing. He said that in the

Psalms, around 75% of them mention the idea of eternity in one way or another. He said in the old hymns, around 80% of them talk about eternity in some form.

But in modern praise and worship music, less than 3% of songs mention heaven or hell or eternity in any form.

That’s a problem. We need to be singing about eternity. We need to be reminding ourselves and one another that this earth is not our home, that our joy isn’t in our circumstances, that we have an all powerful magnificent God who is worth worshipping for who he *is*, not just for what he does for us or how he makes us feel.

So please hear me, I’m not saying all modern praise and worship is bad. Not at all. What I’m saying is that we need to be really careful that the content of our worship is deep and varied and saturated with scripture.

So you might notice that we’re bringing the lights up a little bit and the instruments down. We want our voices to be the loudest thing we hear, because we’re called to sing to one another, and we’re called to sing thankfully to God.

Our singing reminds us of the gospel.

Brian Chapell says in his book Christ centered worship:

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*The message of God’s provision of grace is as vital for daily Christian living as it is for conversion. Without assurance of grace, we despair in our sin. Without reminder of grace, we depend on our own strength. Without rejoicing in grace, we presume the merit for our performance.*

**(SLIDE)** This is key: *Unless we make the communication of the gospel the frame and focus of our worship, our ceremonies possess only a form of godliness without the power of God.* **(SLIDE)**

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Church, we desperately need the gospel. It is as vital for our daily living in Christ as it was the moment we were saved. We want our worship to be so saturated with the gospel that it kicks out any ideas we might form in our head that we can do this on our own.

And I want those gospel saturated lyrics to be in our hearts so that as we go throughout our week, we will have songs pop into our heads that remind us of the greatness of our Savior and the sureness of our hope.

Lyrics like In Christ Alone:

*No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

So as we gather each week to know Christ Truly, we aren't going to reinvent the wheel. We aren't going to rely on our own creativity. We're going to preach the Word. In season and out of season. And we're going to allow the Holy Spirit to make it clear to us. And we're going to worship Christ. We're going to sing songs that praise God for the gospel, and remind one another of how great our savior is.

We serve a great God. Let's make him known Truly, for who he is. Let's pray.

*Father, we thank you for the gift of preaching and corporate worship. We thank you for the opportunity to gather each week and be reminded of the gospel. You know how badly we need that, God. You know how weak of a people we are, how forgetful we are, how quick we are to forget the ways you've worked in the past. Help us to be a church that declares the truth of your Son. May our gatherings on Sunday mornings be a beacon of truth to our hearts, and to a world in need. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*