

Believing the Unbelievable Gospel

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Preacher: Marvin Wiseman

[0 : 00] The message is Believing the Unbelievable Gospel. And I would like you to please turn to the book of 1st Corinthians, chapter 1.

And in 1st Corinthians, chapter 1, we'll be looking at verses 18 through 25.

For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. But to us who are being saved, it is the power of God.

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

[1 : 16] For since in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom did not come to know God. God was well pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

For indeed, Jews ask for signs. And Greeks search for wisdom. But we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness.

But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

To say that this is an extraordinary passage of scripture is quite an understatement. And it is describing the message of the cross as nothing but mere foolishness on the part of a lot of people. Particularly those who hear it the first time. So in connection with that, we are talking about believing the unbelievable gospel. What is it that makes it unbelievable?

[3 : 01] Well, you realize, of course, there isn't anything about it that is actually unbelievable. But it is perceived that way in many areas. In fact, sad to say, it is perceived that way even in a lot of organizations that call themselves a church.

What I'm going to share with you now is a bare bones in a nutshell expression of the gospel. The whole story from beginning to end.

But it's going to be very brief. Hopefully, we'll have some time for Q&A,; but I'm not promising that. And we'll see where this foolishness of the gospel takes us.

So bear with me, please, if you will. Because this is something that ought to be known and understood by everybody.

But it isn't. Not even close. So here we go. For the past 2,000 years, Christians have believed there is a being called God and that he is responsible for having created all things.

[4 : 20] Included in the creation of the heavens and the earth are people he created by bringing only two humans into being said to have been created in the likeness and image of the creator.

These two humans, called Adam and Eve, were responsible for the beginning of the entire human race, which today numbers around 6 billion people, populated all over the earth.

Christians believe those two original beings, Adam and Eve, turned against their creator by disobeying him in favor of obeying God's enemy, described as Satan or the devil.

As a result of their disobedience, the entire earth, under Adam and Eve's dominion, was placed under a divine curse, a curse that eventually would end in the death of all human beings in each succeeding generation.

To counteract the negative consequences of human sin, God, motivated by love for his fallen creation, decided to provide a way for lost, disobedient humans to once again be connected with him.

[5 : 43] He would provide a way back to him by devising a plan whereby their sin and disobedience would not be held or counted against them.

Because sin carries the just penalty of death, each human being is under that sentence. That is why God in his love and mercy devised a way that our sentence of death could be transferred to someone else who could make that death payment on our behalf without our having to make it. But no other person could make that payment that could be acceptable to a holy God because they too would be contaminated with human sin and thus constitute a payment unacceptable to God. The only acceptable payment that could be made would have to be someone of humanity, not contaminated with sin.

And such was the very purpose of Jesus Christ the Savior being born. He is described as the sinless Son of God who is of the same nature and essence as God his Father.

[7 : 04] An agreement was made that the Son would bring his sinless nature to earth and be encased or incarnated in a human body born of a sinful woman named Mary.

Yet, he would avoid contamination from sinful Mary because the seed planted in her would not be from a man nor would the egg be contributed by Mary.

It would be the result of what the angel Gabriel announced to Mary in Luke's Gospel, chapter 1, explaining, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God and you shall name the child Jesus for he shall save his people from their sin.

He will also be called Emmanuel which means God with us. So Jesus would grow to manhood, be introduced to Israel by John the Baptist as the Messiah of Israel and as the sacrificial Lamb of God who will take away the sin of the world.

He will do that because of his love and obedience to his Father and his love for lost sinful humanity for which he will die. He was able to do that because in taking human flesh upon him he possessed a physical body capable of death and he was able to do that because he possessed a sinless nature that made his sacrifice acceptable to his Holy Father and he was able to do that because while he was not only a man capable of death but because he was the sinless Son of God he was able to pay the infinite price that would be adequate and applicable to the entire human race.

[9 : 15] Thus the scriptures say when Jesus was on the cross that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not counting their sins against them so that he who knew no sin was made to be sin on our behalf so that we might receive and become the very righteousness of God in Christ thus being freed from and forgiven of our sin because Jesus paid our sin debt for us.

Such is called the gospel which means good news. It is what the Apostle Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures.

Because of all this the Apostle Paul concluded in 2 Corinthians 5 that since God in Christ made provision for our being reconciled to God we need only complete the transaction God began. Have you done that? Have you completed the transaction God began? God did his part in providing Jesus to die for your sins.

What have you done about that? What is your part? The provision that God made through Christ gave God the basis for extending to us the invitation to come to him for forgiveness and cleansing.

[11 : 26] Said the Apostle Paul so we beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God. And we do that we do that by accepting the gracious offer of salvation that Christ purchased for us when he died as our substitute.

It is with our will that we choose to accept God's offer. If you have not done that you may and you certainly should.

it is a decision that only you can make and if you do you will receive the entire package of benefits that Christ purchased for you when he died in your place.

This is why this entire scenario just described is called good news. It is the gospel or the good news of God. And the question that is put to all of us is what have we done about this good news?

What will you do? You have the two options. You may accept this biblical story of redemption and appropriate it or take it to yourself make it yours or you may walk away and reject it and say thanks but no thanks that's not for me.

[12 : 56] many people do and the reason at least why most of them do is because they consider what I just shared with you to be unbelievable.

To them it is fantasy like it is kind of like a fairy tale. it is a nice heartwarming story but it does not have any validity to it.

It is not really true. You cannot put any stock in that and they might have all kinds of objections that they would marshal against what the scriptures call God's good news.

You do need to know however that neutrality is not possible because what I have just shared with you what I have just shared with you is absolutely true and we all need to get on board with it by embracing it and spreading it or or it's all a lie it's just a gigantic hoax that has somehow been perpetrated upon humanity and there is no basis of reality in it that the millions in the past and the millions in the present who believe this story that I just shared have all been scammed and Jesus Christ is the greatest huckster and con man who ever lived and he succeeded in hoodwinking millions of people some of whom even gave their lives as martyrs because they believed him there is no middle ground to those options doing nothing is doing something doing nothing is rejecting we embrace this truth assuming we believe it and if we believe it how can we not embrace it and I recognize that there are many who consider it unbelievable I remember the first the very first time I heard it well I guess I can't very well remember I must restate that because the first time I heard the gospel that could be expressed as the gospel was from my first wife who was a believer and was very much concerned for my soul especially from the standpoint that she was contemplating possibility of marrying me and I do recall vaguely that she strung some scripture verses together and said something about salvation and the gospel and what not but you know what it was just like water off a duck's back because I had stars in my eyes for this girl and I was so taken by just looking at her and listening to her even though what she was saying sounded like nice sweet old religious stuff but it just kind of went right over my head and that's the way it is with a lot of people when they hear this gospel many think well it's too easy it's it's just it's just that's that's too easy if some say

[16:45] I've actually heard the statement made by some and I'm not even sure that there is a God but if there is a God and if there is a it will all be based on merit that you either had or didn't have and it certainly won't be based on some ridiculous giveaway program like you're talking about with your gospel because the gospel makes it ever so clear that this thing called salvation eternal life etc is a gift a free gift now please don't think of it as being cheap very very expensive because it costs somebody more than you or I could ever imagine to make that free gift available and as I've often said through the giving of his son

God did the very most that he could do so he would only have to require from you the very least that you can do that's why it's called good news I suppose in some terminology we might call it incredible but that's not an accurate word to use with the gospel because when you say incredible you're saying something does not have credibility it is not worthy of being believed so the gospel is not incredible although we use that term you know when people understand that it goes beyond the realms of the norm we had a party last night great how was oh it was incredible and what you mean was it was just a real bash it was just a wonderful wonderful part and we use the word incredible but it's not a word that conveys truth it's the word that conveys untruth something is incredible it's not worthy of being believed and the word fantastic this gospel of

Jesus Christ is the most fantastic thing that ever happened no it isn't no it if you look up the dictionary definition of fantastic it means fantasy like it isn't true it isn't real but when we use that word in our common vernacular people don't think of it that way they don't think of it in a dictionary definition they just think of it in terms of being exceptional and really special and that's the way we use the words incredible and fantastic but this gospel this good news is the absolute focus center core whatever you want to call it of the universe for all time and it is in the person of Jesus Christ and who he is and what he did and why it matters and how you are to appropriate it and this gospel we appropriate and we believe it and we accept it in the very same way that we do anything else some people make the mistake of thinking that the gospel is well it is it is it's it's a religious thing and as a religious thing or a sacred thing it has to be addressed in some kind of unofficial religious way no it doesn't no it doesn't it is a very special thing it is the most important thing it is the most wonderful thing the best good news that anyone has ever heard but the appropriation of it is very basic and very simple and very down to earth and there is nothing religious about it per se it is not hard to understand it is not well let us go if we may

Romans chapter 10 look at this for just a moment Romans chapter 10 it's a beautiful thing I tell you brethren my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them speaking of Israel is their salvation for I

bear them witness that they have a zeal for God but not in accordance with knowledge that's another way of saying they have a lot of religiosity about them they know the hoops to jump through they know the words to use they know the hymns to sing they know they may even know the verses to quote but not in accordance with knowledge for not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own ah there is one of the reasons there is a big reason why the gospel is unbelievable to many they want something they can do because if it's something that you can do then you get some credit you get some acknowledgement but the gospel of the grace of God is that Jesus gets all of the credit he doesn't get 90% of it and you get 10% he gets all of the credit and you get all the benefit now is that a deal or is that a deal that's why it's called good news that that is amazing not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God because the righteousness of God is complete and absolute and entire and lacking nothing our righteousness well you've seen the little book that we've distributed I don't know how many copies of it but Andy Stanley's little book called since nobody's perfect how good is good enough that's a rather plaguing question and you'd be surprised how many people think of

[23 : 22] God's salvation and connecting with God in those terms how good do I have to be for God to accept me and by the way it would be nice also to know what kind of sins and how many can I get away with and still make it we're all kind of construed like that you know we want that we want that wiggle room there and do you know there is no such number because the righteousness that is required for God to accept has nothing to do with how much it has everything to do with what kind because there's two kinds of righteousness there is a perfect righteousness and there is an imperfect righteousness that is lacking and even if there were some by some stretch of the imagination a certain number of good things you have to do to offset the bad things how many would it be nobody can answer that and because there's no answer to that you never would know if you've done enough

I remember years ago when I was with the radio station was called on to talk to a lady who'd been listening to the radio station she was patient in the hospital in intensive care family didn't expect her to make it she'd been listening to the radio station and was quite concerned about her salvation and the family called the station one day and asked if I would go and call on her and give her some comfort from the scriptures and I was glad to do so and I visited with her a little we exchanged the niceties of the day and we got down to business and I said so where do you know where you stand how would you diagnose your case do you know where you are with God and she looked at me with sad mournful eyes and I'll never forget and she said well pastor I just hope I've done enough I just hope I've done enough and that of course was a clue that this dear lady was thinking in terms of her good deeds and her merit after all we are supposed to be nice aren't we we're supposed to be good aren't we we're supposed to do good things and you would be amazed you would be amazed dear friends how many people how many people many of them even in our churches even in our churches that think that really believe that this thing called the

Christian life is all made up about doing good things and being nice to people and if you do enough good things and you're nice to enough people God will reward you with heaven and do you know something it's perfectly logical really it's not biblical but it's logical it computes with our fallen human intellect that makes a lot of sense because the whole business of life works on the merit system everybody knows that you do good things there's a reward you do bad things there's a punishment so the name of the game is to please God do as many good things as you can and however many it takes you just hope you keep stacking them up and maybe it'll get to the place of where you is there any comfort in that no any assurance in that no anything in that that can be called good news no all that does is set you on edge put a big question mark over your life with no answers and yet that's where many people are so how good do you have to be there is a righteousness that is imperfect that

God completely rejects because you see because God himself is perfect what kind of a standard do you think he has yeah it's a standard that's consistent with his own nature and character it is perfect so what I'm saying then and you ask so mark are you saying that all I have to do is be perfect and God will accept me right so honey your work is cut out for you oh by the way even if you start today on an expedition of trying to be perfect what are you going to do about all the imperfections in the past how are you going to get rid of those where are those going to go see the gospel says that

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and he gave to us the ministry of reconciliation and we preach this message this gospel to others and we say be reconciled to God because Jesus Christ has already done everything that needs to be done for you to come to God just as you are with all of your imperfections with all of your faults with all of your fears with all of your failures with all of your dirty secrets God wants you just as you are come to him and he will give you a righteousness that he can accept and won't be yours it belongs to Jesus and he purchased it for you when he died on that cross and Paul goes on to say that we might be made the righteousness of God in him are you kidding me the righteousness of God yes that's the only thing that God will accept and when you believe on the

[29 : 38] Lord Jesus Christ God not only forgives your sin blots out your transgressions but he imputes within you he places in you the very righteousness of Jesus Christ as an absolute gift no strings attached hard to believe yeah yeah yep it is hard to believe that's why I'm calling this believing the unbelievable gospel it is hard to believe because it militates against the way we think it is completely contrary to human logic life doesn't work that way that's not the way people think and you're right but it is the way God thinks and that's all that matters because heaven is his not ours and he is the one who determines who is the candidate for it and who is not this is amazing stuff what I am sharing with you is called the gospel the good news and I've often heard the phrase and you have too if you ever hear something that sounds too good to be true beware it probably isn't true because there are all kinds of scammers and charlatans out there that have all kinds of gimmicks and gadgets and schemes that are designed for just one thing and that is to separate you from your money and they can make some pretty attractive offers that sound so good but the end result thereof is often bankruptcy or whatever something that goes along with it because it wasn't true even though it sounded really good but let me tell you something this gospel this good news you need to understand is linked inseparably linked connected to the integrity of the living God and God is making that offer to you because Jesus already picked up the tab and the question to you is are you going to accept the payment that

Jesus made or are you somehow going to try to do this thing your way on your own God this is why this is why Paul says well I can't get there until we get here I want you to look at this Romans chapter 10 thing Christ is the verse 4 Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes Moses writes that the man who practices the righteousness which is based on law shall live by that righteousness but the righteousness based on faith speaks thus do not say in your heart who will ascend into heaven that is to bring Christ down or who will descend into the abyss that is to bring Christ up from the dead what does it say the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith which we are preaching now this is so simple and so powerful and yet on the surface it seems kind of complex but what

Paul is saying here is this listen this gospel that is available and your opportunity to respond to it what has to be done to make this a package deal what has to be done to complete it you're doing business with Jesus Christ well what Paul is saying what do you have to do ascend into heaven do you have to ascend into heaven and find Christ there and bring him down to do business with him that's nonsense that's probably as difficult as some people would make it or who would descend into the abyss that is to bring Christ up from the dead no no none of these things are necessary these are extreme ridiculous propositions that don't figure into the real thing at all what does figure in what is it that counts how does this transaction complete it what does it say the word is near you in your mouth and in your heart that is the word of faith which we are preaching and you've got it in yours because I just put it there and it has been put there for the last 15 or 20 minutes it is in you the key to connecting this the key to completing this transaction is not up in heaven it's not down it is in here it is inside your being because do you know what it is that is utilized inside your being it is your will your volition same kind of belief same kind of commitment no different nothing particularly religious about it nothing particularly eerie or sacred about it it is a simple act of the will in the same way and I don't know a better illustration than the one I've used before when a man and woman stand here before a minister and they express their vows to each other the question is will you take this man to be your lawful wedded husband husband you are exercising your volition you are saying I will that is a deliberate intentional decision that you are making now let's get this really clear that's the same kind of a decision that you make in receiving Jesus Christ as your savior there's no special setting there's no special words there's no spiritual religious mumbo jumbo it is a simple act of the will and you are in charge of it so the ball is in your court that's exactly what he's saying what

will you do that is the word of faith which we are preaching if you will confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord believe in your heart that is in the core of your being God raised him from the dead you shall be saved no ifs ands or buts about it you mean all you have to do is believe listen that's all you can do that's all you can do is believe and when you believe on the

Lord Jesus Christ that isn't the same as believing in him most everybody believes in him even atheists believe in him yeah I believe in Jesus I believe there was such a guy as Jesus of Nazareth that he walked around the earth 2000 years ago yeah I believe that that's got nothing to do with salvation but when you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ it means you are taking yourself your past your present your future and you are committing all you are to this one with your will you are accepting Jesus Christ as your savior you are with your will resting relying trusting placing confidence in him not in yourself or what you hope to do that's the gospel

[38 : 08] I can't make it any clear but it still sounds like such good news many just can't believe it or won't believe and you know something I understand that because this is why this is why for most people it takes repeated exposure to the gospel before they get it up until that time they just don't connect the dots they don't they don't put it together they know and the best they can do is to think that well it's got something to do with religion it's got something to do with holiness it's got something to do but this plan this plan called the plan of salvation that orchestrated by God and carried out by Christ and applied by the spirit of

God this is it folks this is everything this is the whole package wrapped up in just one element and and it's name is Jesus and it's what everything is all about and you are either with that program or you're not there isn't any middle ground so where are you I do not have the ability to look inside anyone's heart and see whether faith is there or not but I can assure you this that God does and before we go I want to go back to 1 Corinthians before I leave you back to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and I just want to pick up on a couple of verses here because it's so important that you get this it would just pain me to no end if anybody left here and didn't understand this and I found out about it oh boy

Paul is rebuking the Corinthians and by the way the people at Corinth were Paul's and he's talking about the divisions that existed among them and about being baptized in the name of Paul and what not he says in verse 14 chapter 1 I thank God I baptized none of you except Crispus and guys and that's something that you need to give a little thought to because it doesn't sound right it doesn't sound right for the apostle Paul to say you know what I'm glad I didn't be glad about what a funny thing to be happy about is there something else going on here that we don't know yeah there is there is and he goes on to say that no one should say you baptize in my name and I baptized household Stephanas and so on so and he said I don't know whether I baptize and yeah that that's kind of quirky and then in verse 17 he says for or because

Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel that good news we've been talking about now we ought to get a little heads up here because talking about things that differ this is something that really differs let me ask you a question when Paul says Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel could Peter and John and James and Andrew and Bartholomew could the twelve apostles make that statement could they say that Christ didn't send us to baptize oh yes he did he surely did and he made it very clear that preaching the gospel of the kingdom and the water baptism that went with it was all part of the same package and if you leave out one of them you haven't given them the whole deal and now

Paul is saying Christ didn't send me to baptize but to preach the gospel and the only conclusion I can reach about this is listen the water baptism thing however it is performed sprinkling pouring immersion three times forward one time backwards whatever it is all a human effort human deed human works it is something that you can and should do under that administration that John the Baptist served under and that the twelve serve under and the preaching of the kingdom all of that was part of the same package and it all had to do with people having something to do in addition to something to believe but when Paul says Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel what I think he is doing is emphasizing it is all about content content content the preaching of that gospel and

[43 : 35] I want to close with a passage in 2nd Corinthians if you'll turn there please this is stunning to me 2nd Corinthians chapter oh my this is so good and there is so much here well look at verse 10 10 10 10 I have to hurry on here Paul is defending his apostleship you know there were people there were people in Corinth and at other places I'm sure who questioned the validity of his

apostleship because after all Paul was not one of the twelve the twelve apostles were those that Jesus chose before his crucifixion when he was still preaching the gospel of the kingdom and Paul the apostle came along later after Christ had risen and gone back to heaven and he was communicating to him and they questioned whether he was really a full fledged apostle whether he really had that authority and some would say here in verse 10 of chapter 10 for they say that is some of the recipients on the receiving end that Paul's letters are weighty and strong but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible what could that have been true about the apostle

Paul are you kidding me or were these people just sour grapes and just trying to belittle him no I'll tell you what I've taken a new position regarding this and I think what they were saying was accurate I really do Paul was no spellbinder Paul was no Apollos Apollos could hold people in the palm of his hand for a couple of hours and everyone would say wow what a speaker but do you know what the apostle Paul must have been like preaching stumbling bumbling not very eloquent at all oh he was educated he was a Pharisee but I don't think he was anything to listen to I really don't and I'll tell you why because with Paul everything was about the content not the deliverer everything was about the message delivered not the one delivering it and I think it would have been perfectly appropriate to look at Paul and say not much to look at is somebody someone else could say yeah he's not much to listen to either but you know what look and if you jump across the page of chapter 11 and verse 6 and Paul says verse 5 he says

I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles but even even if I am unskilled in speech I don't think that was mock humility I think it was true I think it was true I don't think Paul was any eloquent orator at all yet I am not so in knowledge hey he's saying I may not have the ability to be a spellbinding preacher and hold people captive for who knows how long but I've got the content and as poorly as it is as I deliver it it's the truth and I'm not ashamed of the gospel because the power is in it it's not in the ability of the one delivering it to be compelling the truth is in the gospel itself however poorly

I deliver it and you know something every preacher ought to take heart at that because we don't have to convince we don't have to persuade all we have to do is tell the truth and it can defend itself someone asked Charles Spurgeon who was a rather gifted preacher do you think it's important that preachers really have the command of the language and be able to express the gospel and Spurgeon replied to be able to defend the gospel and Spurgeon replied well defending the gospel is kind of like defending a lion all you need to do is let him out of his cage and he won't need any defending that's the way with the gospel Paul says the gospel is the power of God wow think of that the power of God the grace of God the gift of God the gospel of God it's all part of the same package just can I call it incredible you know what

I mean and fantastic and you know what I mean because it is that question I want to put to you now is have you done business with this information very possibly everyone here may already have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ but the likelihood is that is not so so dear friend if you are here today without the righteousness of Christ I want you to know our heart goes out to you we love you we care about you but God loves you and cares about you a whole lot more than we do and he demonstrated that in giving of his son and would you bow your head with me please our father this grand old good news is just absolutely indescribable and we've done what we can with our feeble attempts to describe the most glorious amazing thing that ever happened on planet earth and we regret that we do not have more to offer that gospel at the same time we recognize the gospel doesn't need to be dressed up by us doesn't need to be it doesn't need to be colored by us that it is as

[50 : 24] Paul said it is the power of God through faith unto salvation to everyone who believes and dear father our prayer today is for any dear soul man or woman boy or girl who may be here that's never never really made that decision maybe they never understood it enough to make it but perhaps they understand it now and want to do something about it and we certainly want to give them that opportunity so while everyone here is heads bowed remaining in an attitude of prayer maybe I'm speaking to you who's never really perhaps understood it or never made a decision but you know enough now that you need to and you want to and would you right in the privacy of your own heart right where you're seated would you be willing to say to

God in exercising your volition dear God I now really understand what this gospel is and what needs to be done about it and I want to do that I have questions I have some fears and doubts and

everything just like everybody else but I know one thing I know I'm not acceptable to you the way I am now and I want to be and I want to put my faith and my trust in you and I want your eternal life I want and I realize that you already paid the price so that you have it to give me and I want that I want to put my life in the hands of the one who loved me and gave himself for me here's my decision here's my heart and I pray that you will give me the assurance that only you can that you have done a work of regeneration in this heart of mind that I don't understand but I will surely appreciate thank you for the extreme end that you went to to make yourself available to me and I want to respond make myself available to you dear friend if you've made that decision God love you and we are so so thrilled for you because we remember when we made that decision to it's life changing it's wonderful it's a taste of heaven here on earth seal to our hearts our father that which we have heard and learned this morning thank you again for this wonderful wonderful truth in Jesus name amen amen you