



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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### The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

1 Corinthians

“Power Preaching”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are in 1 Corinthians. We've just started a series in that book. We are in chapter 2 this morning, we're beginning chapter 2. We're looking at verses 1 through 5 of 1 Corinthians 2. Paul writes:

"And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, it's a privilege and a blessing to be here this morning on this Lord's day with your people, with our Bibles open, considering the text that we've just read. Bless us as we do that. You promised to do that. Your Word is full of great promises and one of them is that your Word never goes forth and returns to you void. And so we have that confidence that this Word is going to have a good effect upon us, but we pray for that. We pray for your promise, that it would come true for us in this hour and that you would bless us and build us up in the faith and give us through our time together a greater confidence in your Word, a greater confidence in your work in our lives.

We live by faith. That means we don't live by sight. We can't see your hand, it's invisible. We can't see you working among us or walking with us. We can't see you

present with us right now and yet the Lord Jesus speaks of walking among the candlesticks in the book of Revelation, walking among the churches, and so we know He's here. He's present with us. Give us a sense of that. Give us a sense of your greatness. Give us a sense of your power because it's with us, it's with us in your Word, and I pray that you'd give us the confidence of that, that which Paul speaks of this morning in this text, and help us to live as a result of that by greater faith, living trusting in you. The assurance we have is that we will not be disappointed.

So Lord, we commend ourselves to you. We pray you'd bless us. We pray that you would take care of us. We know you'll do that. Give us the confidence of that. May the teaching of your Word have a good effect upon us. Open our hearts to receive it. We can't arrive at the truths that are presented to us in our own strength or ability. We can't even understand or believe the text that we've read apart from the ministry of the Spirit of God, and so we pray for that ministry, that He'd open our hearts to receive the truth that's given, that we would think clearly, and that we'd be built up in the faith so that we would know you better and that we would reflect your character to those around us. Give us a week of good testimony before the world. Give us a week in which we walk with you and enjoy our fellowship with you.

So we commend this time to you. We pray you'd bless it, build us up in the faith. We pray that for the meeting tonight, that you'd bless it and the fellowship that follows, and we look to you to give us the great blessings that we read about in your Word, the spiritual blessings, but also, Lord, we pray for the material blessings of life as well. We begin by just thanking you for them. They are abundant. They're more abundant than we realize. You take care of us at every moment of our existence and as I've said before – I can't say it enough – Father, you are so faithful in your care of us that we can take it for granted. The world does that. The world has no idea of where its life and strength comes from. It shuts it out. It refuses your testimony. It thinks it stands by itself and it generates itself and that it's self-sufficient when we all live and move and have our existence in you.

Every one of us, believer and unbeliever alike, but we as your children who've been given eyes to see, we should know and be thankful every moment of our life that we have what we have. You bless us materially and even when the material blessings of life are removed for a time, even when we're without employment or our health fails, all of that is designed for a purpose, to draw us close to you and to our fellowship with you, and I pray

that that will be the result. We do have some among us who are without employment. We pray that you'd open doors of opportunity for them and that they would see your hand work in a mighty way in their life.

And we have some among us who have lost their health and are in very desperate conditions, at least from the world's standpoint, but they are in your hand and you are in complete control, and I pray that you give them a sense of that. Make them aware of the great promises that we have. Assure them of your care. We have the great assurance that everything is going to work for our good, that in Christ, those who love you, everything works together for their good. What a great promise that is. What a great assurance that is. So Father, bless us now as we look to your Word. May this be a helpful and enjoyable time of study and worship, and to that end, I pray that you'd bless the hymn that we will learn this morning. Bless the special music as the trio prepares us for this time of worship, and I pray that we sing it well and learn it well and be blessed by it. We commend our time together to you. In Christ's name, Amen.

[Message] The Bible, as you well know, is full of great promises for God's people, but to my mind, one of the greatest promises in the Bible was given to a man named Zerubbabel. He was the governor of Judah who led the Jews home from Babylon. Back home, the temple lay in ruins, and the first task the governor took up was to rebuild it. It was a good work and God's work, but God's work never goes unopposed and powerful enemies rose up against it. After laying the foundation, work stopped for a long time. It was discouraging. So what was he to do? Take matters into his own hands? Scheme a little? Force things a bit? Do whatever to get things done? That's always the temptation, do things the world's way. But the Lord had encouragement for him. It's found in the book of Zechariah, chapter 4 verse 6. "Not by might nor by power but by my Spirit," says the Lord of hosts.

Then the Lord said, "What are you, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you will become a plain." That was His promise. He would remove all of the obstacles to his work. God would knock down the mountains. So Zerubbabel was to do what all of us are to do: trust in the Lord. We're also doing God's work. We're also building His temple. We're to do it by depending upon the Spirit. After all, unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it. It's the Lord's work, not ours. That's what Paul wanted to teach the Corinthians. They needed the lesson. They were charmed by the world, by its wisdom and strength, like all of us are. Its business models work, its CEOs are effective, the world and its ways are impressive. They are

now, they at least seem to be. They all seem to work and they certainly seemed to work in that day. Maybe we should follow them and adapt the world's methods.

That's what the Corinthians were thinking, but Paul wanted to show them a better way, the right way, which is complete dependence on the Lord, on His wisdom and his power. He showed them that first by his instruction in chapter 1. He told them that the gospel is the power of God. So he's told them that, he's shown them that through his instruction, now he does that by his example, and he begins chapter 2 by reminding them of how he came to Corinth. He came in weakness and he preached the gospel of the cross, which is foolishness to unbelievers. He said that already back in chapter 1 verse 18, "for the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing." And yet in spite of an unimpressive messenger and a hated message, what is to the world a foolish message, people responded. These Corinthians believed and were saved, and Paul says that was the proof or demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit that works through the gospel.

Through Him, the temple is being built. We don't need to adopt the methods of men or conform to the ways of the world to be successful in God's work. In fact, the only way to succeed, to truly succeed if we want real, lasting success, is to depend completely on God, to do things His way. That's Paul's lesson in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and again it is a lesson he teaches through his own example and experience. Paul was consistent. He lived what he preached. So when he came to Corinth, he didn't use the methods of the world. He preached the simple, unvarnished truth of the gospel and he left the results to the Lord. He preached the gospel and he stayed out of the way. "And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified," and that was sufficient because as Paul has already said, the message of the cross is the power of God.

There's no message like this message. There's no word like this Word. It is supernatural. The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. That's what the Bible asks us to believe about itself, and that's what the apostle believed, and he ordered his life and his ministry accordingly. Its success, the success of this ministry, the success of God's Word is not dependent on us but on God himself. And Corinth was a real test of whether Paul did or did not believe that because the Corinthians were enamored of human wisdom and eloquence. The whole Roman world was. It had a long romance with words and style and speeches that could stir the soul. And that's not an antique interest,

that's modern as well. I can remember 20 years ago watching William F. Buckley on his *Firing Line* and usually he'd debate someone over a political issue, and at this time he was – I think he was in London or maybe in Cambridge or Oxford talking to a group of students, and I don't remember the subject, I just remember what he said. He gave a brief personal analysis of the British people, and he said, "I think that the British are in love with words." And I thought, "Well, so are you."

If you are familiar with William Buckley, you know he had a vast vocabulary and he always had a word in his column that you – "What does that mean?" and you'd have to look up some arcane term. But it was always the right word for the idea that he was expressing and so that's good. There's nothing wrong with that. That in fact is a very good thing, to be precise. That's articulation. It's finding the right word, the precise word, for an idea and it opens up ideas for us. There's nothing wrong with a romance with words, so to speak. And that was true of this age. The problem is when the words and the expressions and the speeches and the eloquence is more important than the ideas and in fact overshadow the ideas. This was an age in which that was the case. It was an age in which public speakers were like entertainers. People put a lot of value on a teacher's skill in giving a well-reasoned argument and in his, the speaker's, power of persuasion.

There's nothing wrong with that, as I say, until the powers of persuasion are more important than the idea for which one is trying to persuade. The good ones, those good orators, were celebrities in their day. Paul wanted none of that. Instead, he determined to restrict his message and his method to Jesus Christ and Him crucified, which was to put his mission at a real disadvantage, humanly speaking. The cross was an offense. He knew that. He knew that going into Corinth but he didn't downplay the cross or try to disguise it with eloquence. He declared it openly because it is true and it alone is the message with power. So Paul didn't need to adopt the world's ways. He didn't resort to persuasive words of wisdom, he says in verse 4, even though the world wanted that. It doesn't mean that Paul was careless about preparing sermons or that he made no effort to show the reasonableness of the gospel. That's not his meaning at all. God's not pleased with sloppy work and He doesn't bless carelessness or poorly reasoned explanations. Now, He may bless in spite of all that but He doesn't bless that.

Preachers and teachers should do their homework. They need to be very skilled in their knowledge and in their ability or their understanding of how to explain things. Paul was that. Paul did his homework, and you see that all through his ministry. You see it through the book of Acts, for example, when Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra on the first missionary journey, Luke writes that the pagans identified Paul, who was the main speaker, as Hermes or Mercury, who was the messenger of the gods.

Paul and Barnabas were both horrified by that and disabused themselves of that notion. They denied it altogether but what it shows is obviously Paul showed some effort and skill in communication, wasn't indifferent to that. The locals were impressed with his speaking, what he said, the way he said it, and he was always thoughtful about what he said and how he said it. He made an effort to connect with his audience in Athens. He used the inscription on the altar, to an unknown god, as an introduction to his sermon in Acts 17.

He was there in Athens, he was by himself, his colleagues were up north in Macedonia, and while he was by himself, he scouted the city. He sought to get a sense of the spirit of Athens, and there he was in the marketplace in the agora. You can go there today and get a sense of what it's like there. In the one corner is the temple to Hephaestus or Vulcan, the god of fire and forgery, and then above the whole thing is the acropolis with the Parthenon and the other temples on that hill. And then in the marketplace below it, in Paul's day, were idols and altars. It was filled with them and they had a shrine to this god and that god, every god that they could think of, they honored there, and in case they missed one, they had this altar to an unknown god and Paul seized on that to say "I'm going to tell you who that unknown god is, He is the God and all of these are no gods." And so he was able to seize upon that.

He was careful in his thinking and saw a way to connect with those people and introduce his sermon, and then at the end of the book of Acts, Paul is in jail in Rome and there he set up a meeting with the rabbis of the city, and Luke writes that he was trying to persuade them concerning Jesus from the law of Moses and from the prophets from morning until evening. He worked his way through the Word of God. He knew the Scriptures. He was steeped in the Word of God in the Old Testament and he could reason through it. Paul was careful about what he said and how he said it. He was aware of the culture where he was, he was sensitive to that. All of this is to say there's nothing wrong with being articulate, nothing wrong with using a good illustration to make things clear. Paul did that but he didn't rely on cheap tricks to win converts. That's his point. He never did anything to compromise or jeopardize the gospel by obscuring the message of the crucified Messiah or by drawing attention to himself.

Now, that was a great temptation in Paul's day because people were impressed with philosophical reason or eloquence of speech. They were entertained by men with these skills. Paul didn't want to simply draw crowds. He wasn't interested in gaining a personal following. He wanted to inform people of Christ and of God's grace and what God has done through His son, what He's done at Calvary. The ministry is not about the preacher. The ministry is not even about the sermon that's preached. It's about Christ. The sermon is simply the way to proclaim God's work of grace through the cross. In one of his

books, Dr. Don Carson, who is professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School – he's a little older than I am, I think, but he was a colleague of Dr. Johnson's there in the early '80s and Dr. Johnson was a friend of his, and he's a well-known scholar, one of the top scholars of New Testament studies today. But in one of his books, it's a popular book, he tells about an Egyptian believer who had extraordinary communication skill in Arabic.

He was a journalist and eloquent. There are two levels of the language in Arabic. There is street Arabic and literary Arabic, and this many was highly respected, widely read, as much for his style as for his conduct. Well, he decided to leave journalism for preaching and soon built up a very large congregation. But many who attended church did so because they liked listening to his beautiful sermons. When he realized that some of the people were there because they were interested in his literary style more so than in Christ, he changed and he began preaching in the common language of the street. He didn't want anything, even a good thing like eloquence, to get in the way of the cross. And that's what Paul is saying here. That's what the ministry is about. It is about the cross, so Paul says he proclaimed to the Corinthians the testimony of God, meaning the testimony about God, about what He has done through the cross of Christ. It was an offensive message. Paul knew that. He'd already been laughed out of Athens.

That's what had happened to him just before he came to Corinth but he refused to soften the message because the cross is the center of the Christian faith. It is the message. Now, it doesn't mean we can't talk about other things, that there's nothing else to speak about but the cross. Paul spoke about many other things. In fact, the book of 1 Corinthians is an example of that. There's not one single theme running through the book. It's not like the book of Romans where you have the main theme being justification by faith. There are many different subjects that he covers here. He writes about marriage in chapter 7, a long chapter about that subject, about spiritual gifts in chapters 12 and 13 and 14, and there in chapter 13, he writes that classic chapter on love. And then in chapter 15, a long chapter about the resurrection. There are many subjects that he deals with. The Christian live involves lots of different things, hope and joy and morality and Paul taught all of that but all of that is based on the cross. All of these things come out of the cross. Christian ethics, morality comes out of the cross.

If there's no cross, there's no morality. At the cross, Christ not only paid the penalty of sin but he broke the power of sin. Without the cross, there's no power over sin. There's no power to resist temptation. We have no morality apart from the cross. All of these things are traced back to the cross. It's something like a wagon wheel. The cross is the hub and everything else that comes out of it are the spokes, they radiate out from the cross. You take away the hub from a wagon wheel and there's no wheel.

Spokes are worthless. Well, remove the cross and there's no gospel. Remove the cross, there's no faith, there's no Christian religion. It's all about the cross, so Paul came to Corinth determined to proclaim the work of God and the cross of Christ, do it in a simple, straightforward way, and let God do His work. It had to be God's work because humanly speaking, everything was against the apostle. His message was foolish to the world and his appearance, his personal presence was unimpressive.

He tells us that, at least he tells us in 2 Corinthians 10:10 that some people said that of him, that his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible. That doesn't sound like much of a preacher, but that's what they said. In fact, there's a 2nd-century document that describes him as being small of stature with a bald head and crooked legs – I think that's bow-legged – with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked. It's a 2nd-century document. We don't know if it's really accurate or not but it's reasonable. Paul may not have been unattractive but neither was he a physically imposing person. So when he walked into Corinth, he entered completely unnoticed. It was a busy city, it was a prosperous place, it was full of hustle and self-confidence. Corinth wasn't waiting for the apostle Paul. It didn't know about him. It didn't care about him. He was a nobody. So when he came to town, he was acutely aware of his personal inadequacies and even overwhelmed by the task that was before him.

He reminds the Corinthians of that in verse 3. He said, "I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling." He even needed some special encouragement. Luke recounts in Acts 18:9-10 that Christ appeared to him in a vision one night and told him not to be afraid. He had his elect in that city. He had his people and many of them in that city and they were going to be saved through that ministry. Not because of anything in Paul, he's the messenger, but because of the power of that message and that message is powerful because the Spirit of God is in it and God has a plan and a purpose and it's going to be worked out. But we see from this that Paul was a real man. I mean a man like you and I, a human person like us. He had the same frailties that we do. He looked at things and he looked at things realistically. He could see what he was up against. He knew that the task was too big for him and he suffered fear in his weakness. He knew that he would be rejected or ignored.

He knew his life would be in danger. He knew that from personal experience. But more than that, he knew the importance of the message, the responsibility that had been laid upon him and his own inability, so he came to Corinth in weakness and fear but he didn't, as someone said, fear the fear. He didn't let it paralyze him. The Lord doesn't expect us to be fearless but He does expect us to be brave. He expects us to be obedient. He expects us to go forward in spite of the circumstances and that's what Paul did. In spite of the fear, he still stood up in the synagogue, he still spoke in the marketplace, he still went



forward with full confidence in the Lord, not confidence in himself, he had no confidence in himself. He had complete confidence in the Lord. He was obedient and the Lord used him, used him greatly. And the fact is, situations like that where we are seriously handicapped in the ministry, where we have our weaknesses and we know them, those are often the occasions when God displays His power most clearly, most dramatically.

That was Paul's experience. He would later write in 2 Corinthians 12 about his thorn in the flesh. We don't know what that was but it evidently was some physical ailment that crippled him in some way, was physically painful. It was humiliating. It was a detriment to him and the ministry and so he prayed that it be removed. In fact, he prayed three times that it be removed and God didn't take it away. Instead, He told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in weakness." And Paul accepted that, in fact Paul could even rejoice in that. We don't like those kinds of things. We want life to be comfortable, we want life to go smoothly for us. We don't like mountains in front of us, but those mountains are put there by God for a purpose, and our afflictions come for a purpose, and it is to show us God's hand and His ability to remove the mountains and to use us in spite of our weaknesses, and He certainly did with Paul. Paul was able to say as a result of that, "When I am weak, then I am strong," meaning he's strong in the Lord's strength, weak in his own strength.

The Lord supplies real power in such situations so that Paul's disadvantages were really his advantages. He trusted in the Lord and didn't lean on his own abilities. Now, that can be difficult, particularly for a person that has a lot of natural gift, for people that have charm or they have that intangible that we call charisma, can be a very difficult thing for a celebrity, say, an athlete, someone who has some position and fame. It's hard for people like that to do what Paul is talking about because the natural gifts can become the focus. It's difficult for a person like that to not allow his personality, his fame, to overshadow the cross. Prominent people can face that challenge of not getting in the way. That's the challenge for them, not drawing people to themselves or to their gifts but rather to Christ. So often people are drawn to a personality rather than the person that's being declared. Paul didn't bring any of that to Corinth.

I'm sure Paul had charm. I'm sure he had warmth. I'm convinced that if you and I could have an audience with the apostle Paul and just sit in a room with him for a few minutes, we would be impressed by his presence. There'd be something about him that drew us to him. It's Christ in him, it's the work of the Spirit in him, it's there. But he came to the city, he says, in weakness and in his weakness, God used him and used him greatly. That's what Paul wanted to impress on the Corinthians. Not so much his own

weakness, he wasn't being diminutive to draw attention to how humble he was or to get them to focus on his weaknesses but to elevate and show the power of God. That's the only explanation that can be given for a church in Corinth, in this worldly, vanity fair city of Corinth. How else do we explain this vibrant church being there except the power of God? It wasn't due to Paul's personal presence and it wasn't due to his persuasiveness. As he reminds them in verse 4, he didn't preach with persuasive of wisdom. Again, that was the method of the world and what people in classical society valued, the ability to impress an audience.

Men studied hard to develop the power of persuasion. Maybe the greatest orator of Greece was Demosthenes. He worked hard at his craft. He studied speeches. He practiced on the seashore by speaking over the roar of the waves. He talked with pebbles in his mouth in order to overcome a speech impediment. He practiced his gestures. As a result, he turned oratory into a science. He became the great persuader of his age. Pericles, the leader of Athens who was himself a great orator, said, "When Pericles speaks, people say how well he speaks, but when Demosthenes speaks, people say, 'Let us march.'" That's what men in Corinth admired, the ability to get men marching, the art of persuasion. That's the kind of man who could draw a crowd and move them to follow him. That's not all bad. We admire people like that. There's a place for that. We want well-reasoned speeches and sermons. Paul was not opposed to that or to persuasion with the truth. What he rejected was the tricks the people used, the devices and the methods to manipulate people. An effective speaker knows how to do that, he knows the tricks, he knows the ways to do that.

The greatest orator and debater of Rome was Cicero, who lived about a hundred years before Christ. He was a master at that. He was a master at bending minds and swaying opinion. He had techniques for doing that, how to hide his weakest arguments and how to so dazzle people with what he said that they accepted his argument without thinking things through. He wrote it down, he put it in a book, people studied these things. It's possible to do that. It's possible to dazzle people with words while communicating very little content. There were tricks of persuasion that worked then and they work today. I was given an interesting book by William Safire, who was a columnist for *The New York Times*. I think he died about a year ago. But it's a book in which he just sets forth a number of great speeches from history, and one of them was from a U.S. Senator from Missouri named George Graham Vest. He was an effective debater and is remembered for a speech that he made as a young lawyer about a dog.

He represented a man who sued another man for killing his pet. Evidently, his client didn't have a real strong case, so Mr. Vest paid very little attention to the testimonies that had

been given or to the facts of the case. Instead, he appealed to people's feelings and he gave an emotional speech about the loyalty of a dog and how when all friends desert, he remains. He will sleep on the cold ground when the wintry winds blow, just to be at his master's side. When riches take wings and reputation falls, he's constant in his love. Then, at his master's end, the noble dog can be found at the gravesite, his head between his paws, his eyes sad. Watchful, faithful, and true even in death. If you love dogs, you can't help but be moved by that, and there wasn't a dry eye in the courtroom. Needless to say, he won the case. He won the case by appealing to the emotions of the jury. Well, that's kind of funny when a lawyer does that, but it's not so funny when a preacher does that, and they can do that as well.

There are ways and techniques to affect the moods of men and compel them to make a decision. It may be through a story that affects a person's feelings and moves him to act on his emotions rather than on reason. It may be through music that can set a mood or the lighting in the room or pressure tactics before a crowd to embarrass or shame people into acting. I wonder how many young people have walked the aisle during an evangelistic service because all their buddies got up and walked the aisle. Pretty soon, he's there by himself and he feels the gaze of the audience and that moves him to walk down the aisle. There are all kinds of reasons that people do things, out of emotion or discomfort. Paul knew how all of that worked. It's not new, it's ancient. And he rejected every form of manipulation. Instead, he was straightforward about the gospel and trusted the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of people to convict them and bring them to faith, and that's what happened in Corinth. His message was simple and direct. He gave them the truth without the tricks, and he says his message came in demonstration of the spirit and power.

Now, that's not two different things. That's not the Spirit's work and miracles. The New Testament sometimes uses two words to express one idea. There's a term for that, it's called hendiadys. It's very common. So what he's saying here is one thing, he's saying it was in the demonstration of the Spirit's power, great power. Miracles don't fit the context, really, if you think about it. He talks about coming in weakness, he didn't come with great shows of power and miracles. He came in the power of the Spirit and that's what he's speaking of here. Paul preached the simple, unvarnished truth of the gospel and the Spirit demonstrated his power in the message through the conversion of the Corinthians, and let me tell you, that's true of everyone here. No less true of us than it was of them.

You are a proof of the Spirit's power. It wasn't through the personal magnetism of the preacher in your case or in the Corinthians' case. It wasn't due to Paul's eloquence or art of persuasion. Apart from all of that, these people believed the gospel. They got conviction and faith. It was a real demonstration of the power of the Spirit, and it is the only thing that can produce such results. The gospel, I should say, is not an irrational message. It's not contrary to the evidence. It is thoroughly reasonable. Read the Bible and look at the world and you see how they fit. What it says is true to life. Evil exists. The world is fallen. Man is sinful. There's nothing that you see in the world that denies that. That's what the Bible says about the world and the world fits it perfectly. The Bible analyzes things correctly, and what it all shows – what the world can't tell you but what the Scriptures do, it tells us the solution, and the solution is the Savior.

We need a savior. That's rational, that's reasonable, but people don't come to realize that, they don't see the truth of it, they don't realize that Christ is the Savior by reason or the power of persuasion. Men need the Word of God and the power of the Holy Spirit for that. It's supernatural. After all, if a person can be persuaded into a decision, then he or she can be persuaded out of it. And emotional decisions never last because emotions always cool and change. Preaching that depends on its own effectiveness and cleverness for results produces the kind of faith that rests on cleverness. That's always shaky and unreliable. Paul wanted reliable converts. He didn't need large groups and popularity; he wanted a work that was real and lasting, so he avoided the tricks and gimmicks. That's what he says in verse 5. The reason he preached as he did was so that their faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God.

The success of the gospel does not depend on the preacher or the evangelist, not ultimately. It comes through the preacher or the evangelist, it comes through us as we give the Word of God. Sometimes it comes simply because there's a Bible there in the hotel room. God doesn't even need a preacher, for that matter. Generally it comes through an individual, but ultimately it's not our work, it's His work. It is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural work. That's what Paul is telling the Corinthians. God promised to remove a mountain before Zerubbabel and He did it. And He will do the same for us when we simply live by faith. When we walk by faith and live by obedience, we'll see His hand, and that's what He asks us to do, trust in Him, follow him, be obedient. Do that at work, at the office or at home. Live a life of obedience to the Lord and wait on Him.

He will give you opportunities to speak to others. Don't try to force things. Be prayerful, be observant, and wait upon the Lord. And when he does give you those opportunities, then give the message, and He'll bless it. That was Dr. Johnson's counsel. I read over his sermon on this lesson, and in his lesson on this text, he advised God's ministers and when he spoke, I think he used that expression, "God's ministers," but what he was speaking, it was anybody who – any Christian. All of us are His ministers. You don't have to stand in a pulpit to be one of the Lord's ministers. We're all His ambassadors and we all have the message. Wherever we go, we're to be speaking it. And what he was saying is whether you're a Sunday school teacher teaching Sunday school or whether you're a businessman at the office or a housewife visiting in the neighborhood, when you're speaking with friends or others about Christianity, as Dr. Johnson said, never stray far from the basics. And in authentic Christianity, the basic is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's the message, and that message has power. That's the message the Spirit of God works through and gives success, real success, lasting success. So may God teach us the lesson that Paul was teaching the Corinthians and may we live that kind of life. Walk by faith. Trust in Him. Well, maybe He's doing a work in the hearts of some of you now, convicting you of sin and convicting you of your need of the Savior. If that's the case, if some of you here or if one of you here is not a believer in Jesus Christ and you sense that, don't reject it, don't turn away from that, don't resist. Come to Christ. Believe in Him. He is God's Son who died for sinners so that all who believe in Him would be saved forever. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved in that moment and forever. And then live for Him. May God help all of us to do that. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace and your mercy and we're reminded of that from Paul's experience. He knew that firsthand. He came into Corinth fearful and yet he saw you work with him, a man who was unimpressive in his appearance. They said his speech was contemptible, and yet you used him because he was faithful and you did a mighty work, you saved Corinthians and you saved us. You saved Dallasites and people from all over, all walks of life. Why? Because you're a gracious, merciful God and you used the Word of God to bring us to yourself. It's your work, it's not ours. Help us to remember that and live in light of it, and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.