In 1935 I was baptized and then raised in one of the largest “mainline” Protestant denominations. But by age twelve I was so disappointed with the pastors sent to us, all preaching the old liberalism so popular in those years, that I asked my parents if I could transfer to the local Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I went with their blessing, and the Lord soon blessed me with deepening biblical faith.

As we survey the American scene today, the mainline churches, rather than returning at last to the biblical faith and embracing the gospel, have merely tried one suggestion after another of “how to attract new members” and subsequently have seen their membership shrink every year. And what is even sadder to me, the term evangelical now seems to have lost all meaning. The newly “emergent” churches continue to call themselves evangelical, but to my amazement have adopted a “cultural relevance” theology that shares much in common with the old liberalism of a century ago.

Most evangelical churches, of course, would still claim to hold to the biblical gospel. But rather than preaching that gospel with joy in its full riches and in the power of the Holy Spirit, too many assume their hearers’ acceptance of that gospel and preach sermons on more “practical” matters such as how to be better spouses, parents, money-managers, and so on. And the sad irony is that without a firm foundation in the fundamentals of our Christian faith, the hearers of such sermons are not achieving even those practical goals.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if our churches are to be truly joyful and God-glorifying, growing in both faith and numbers, the gospel must not be assumed, it must be preached and believed (see Rom. 10:13–15). And you, the sheep for whom the Shepherd died, must insist through your elected officers that the gospel not be assumed but preached in your church.

We have all seen the frightening polls. The most recent one I saw said that those professing themselves to be Christians numbered 75 percent of those who reached adulthood in the 1950s (my generation), 35 percent of the next generation (my children’s), and, this ongoing study projected, will number just 15 percent of the generation now reaching adulthood (my grandchildren’s). This study concluded: “Church-raised eighteen-year-olds are rejecting their faith at an alarming rate.” How are they to be reached and retained? The gospel must be preached to them in the power of the Spirit.

Why is it that so-called “practical” sermon topics have replaced the gospel? May I suggest this: Marshall McLuhan, Canadian communications guru of the 1960s — he of “the medium is the message” fame — declared that “the church’s problem is that the Gospel is Good News in a world in which bad news is news.” But not only is the Bible’s message good news, it is miraculous, seemingly beyond-our-imagination good news! And let’s face it, such news is harder to believe than ordinary, everyday news about how to improve relations with your neighbor. Yes, the gospel can seem to be almost too good to believe. But we must believe, because God’s Word is true and attested by many evidences (Heb. 2:3–4).

I would invite you to read again the marvelous narrative of John 11:17–45. The question that our Lord addressed to Martha, He addresses now to us by His Spirit: “Do you believe this?” (v. 26). May the Spirit enable each of us to answer as Martha did: “Yes, Lord; I believe.”

How discerning is Martha’s reply? Jesus has made an unthinkable assertion — unthinkable on the lips of anyone but God Himself: “I am the resurrection and the life” (v. 25). He then asks her: “Do you believe this?” And Martha answers, “Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming . . . .” Martha correctly viewed the resurrection as the great coming saving act of God. She knew that the resurrection would take place “on the last day” (v. 24). But now the further truth dawns upon her that here before her stands the one who is Himself the great final saving act of God — and He has already come! Here is the one promised to come into the world and usher in a new world, a new age. Resurrection, the gift of life — this is the Messiah’s work. “Yes, Lord, I believe that life is available now, in you,” Martha says in effect, “for you are the Christ, the Son of God, the one promised to come into the world.”

But we have more than Jesus’ authoritative testimony concerning His life-giving power. We also have the authoritative sign that He worked. “Lazarus, come out!” Jesus called out, and he who had died did in fact come out (vv. 43–44). Jesus exercised resurrection power. And thus He manifested Himself in deed as well as in word as the true and final Savior, the Christ, the Son of God.

Albert Camus, the French existentialist atheist novelist so popular with college students in my day, has his hero in The Plague say at one point: “Salvation is much too big a word for me. I don’t aim so high.” But it is not too high or wonderful for Jesus! The good news of eternal resurrection life in Jesus is not too good to be true. Our Lord Himself says: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (vv. 25–26).

https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/too-good-be-true