

Lesson 5 – The Gospel Defined

How would you define the word “Gospel”?

The word literally means “Good news”. What is that good news? Our first reaction is to say, “the good news is that we have eternal life” but that isn’t where the good news starts. The good news that is to be proclaimed is that Jesus Christ is Lord. Salvation is the result of the good news of Jesus’ Lordship. In other words, the Gospel is primarily about Christ and secondarily about us.

In the Bible the word “gospel” is usually used alongside **making proclamation** of good news more than it is in just the **information itself**. In other words, the Gospel information does no good unless someone is talking about it, shouting about it, and announcing it to those who need to hear it (Acts 8:25, 40; 14:7; 14:21; 15:7; 16:10).

Of the four books of the Bible we call “Gospels” only Matthew and Mark use the word “gospel”. Matthew almost always connects the word “gospel” with “the kingdom of God” (**Read Matt 24:14 & Mark 1:14-15**).

In Matthew and Mark the word “gospel” is used of Jesus’ life and ministry (Matt 2:43 & 9:35) and also of his death (Matt 26:13).

How are Jesus’ life and ministry “good news”?

How are Jesus’ death and resurrection “good news”?

How about for Paul? How does Paul use the word “gospel”? While the Gospels use the word less than a half dozen times, Paul uses it 60 times!

Read Romans 1:1-5

What does Paul say the gospel is about in these verses?

In verses 5-6, what does Paul say the Gospel has to do with us?

Like the early Christians, we need to understand the good news about Jesus, not just so we can know it in our minds but so that we can also proclaim it to those who need to hear it.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:15-18

How did Paul feel about God’s allowing him to preach the Gospel?

Why do you think more Christians don’t feel that way today?

Proclaiming the Gospel should not be solely about preachers in pulpits preaching sermons on it a few times a year or about a Bible class or Bible study dedicated to reach the lost. Proclaiming the Gospel is something that should flow out of us very naturally because it is about who we are and whose we are and we can't help but share it with anyone who will listen.

Think about it this way – If Jesus is the way to eternal life and you have faith in Christ...should it not burn within our hearts to share that good news to those who are lost and in need of salvation?

There are two goals for this series on “The Gospel”:

1. The first goal is that you would understand and are transformed by the Gospel straight from the pages of the Bible.
2. The second is that you might learn it and live it in a way that makes you feel more comfortable sharing it with those who need it.

Why is it important that our faith is more than just head knowledge?

It is entirely possible to know all the right answers but be rotten to the core and have no meaningful faith. Our faith must result in Christ-like action, not because our actions earn salvation but because it is the natural fruit produced by a life in tune with God through faith.

So back to our initial question – *“What is the Gospel?”*

Read these verses and mention some things the Gospel includes:

- Romans 15:15-16
- Colossians 1:21-21
- Ephesians 1:13 & Colossians 1:5
- Romans 1:16-17
- Colossians 1:3-6

The Gospel has power to save. The Gospel convicts. It cuts the heart. It transforms and makes new creation. The Gospel is God's savings acts as his kingdom defeats the powers of darkness and ultimately restores all things and makes everything new (Acts 3:21 & Rev 21:5). The Gospel is a big deal!

Application

How has your faith impacted your life?

What are some areas that the Gospel truth still needs to do some work on?

How do you feel you might be able to proclaim the Gospel to those around you?

Lesson 6 – The first sin and the penalty of death

The Bible only makes it three chapters before God's perfection creation is marred by the sinful decisions of the first people (Adam and Eve). **Read Genesis 2:15-17**

God gave them a command and desired their obedience. *What was the consequence of disobedience?*

Why do you think God would give the death penalty for eating forbidden fruit, sounds pretty harsh?

- There is a principle being taught here...God has expectations for his people and there are consequences for disobedience.

We either choose God or something else (usually self)...God's way or our way. All of life boils down to that. If we choose God and His way of doing things we have the blessing that comes from being in relationship with Him. If we choose our way then we reject the life and blessing that come from God.

Here are a few verses to consider:

Isaiah 59:1-2

Romans 3:23-24

Romans 6:23

What do you get out of these verses?

Every person who is able to make willful decisions about their life (some call that the age of accountability) have sinned. The penalty of sin is death. That means all deserve to die but God has provided salvation through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ (more on that in future lessons).

Before we can talk about how God saves us we have to realize that we are in need of being saved. The world doesn't like to talk about or even believe sin is real.

Why does the world try to reject that there is a right and wrong way to live?

Why does the world reject truth?

Why is the world, apart from God, lost?

Those aren't popular things to say but they are biblical, true things to say. We know that because that is what God has told us through scripture.

Read Ephesians 2:1-3

It is important that none of us act in an arrogant manner about our faith because we realize that all of us were lost and in need of God at some point in our lives. If we are going to appreciate what salvation is, we have to realize just how badly we need it.

The temptation is to think that we really aren't all that bad of people. But that is just not the case. Here is how the apostle Paul, one of the heroes of our faith, described himself,

1 Timothy 1:12-16

If that is how Paul describes himself, where does that leave us?

Read Isaiah 64:6-7

Isaiah tells us that we have no righteousness of our own...at our best we are like filthy rags.

Application

Why is it tempting to think that if we just live pretty good lives...maybe a little better than average...that everything should be ok?

That kind of thinking is deceiving because like Paul said, the wages of sin is death. When you sin the payment is death. There is a way to be saved from that but you have to start with that principle that is outlined over and over again in scripture. The world doesn't want to believe it, but it is still true.

Sin is serious business because sin, apart from Christ, is deadly.

How do these verses remind you of just how serious sin really is and what does that mean for how you are going to deal with the temptations you are facing today?

Lesson 7 – Echoes of Hope

The Old Testament spends quite a bit of time pointing us to Christ. Even in the very first sin, there is a prophesy of Jesus – **Genesis 3:14-15**

There are hundreds of predictive prophecies about Jesus in the Old Testament. Along with that, there are countless stories that give us tiny peaks into the future, echoes of hope along the road to salvation that comes through Christ in the New Testament.

What are some stories in the Old Testament that remind you of Jesus?

- Examples might include the exodus, Passover, Elijah/Elisha and many more

The Passover was one of the biggest things in the Old Testament that points the way to Jesus.

Read Exodus 12:1-13

What similarities do you find in these verses between the Passover and Jesus?

The exodus is all about judgment and deliverance. The first-born sons of Egypt die while the first-born sons of the Israelites survive. The blood of the lamb saves the Israelites babies from death.

How is Jesus like that lamb to us?

Read Revelation 5:1-10

The ultimate irony – nothing gets weaker than a slain lamb and yet this lamb is still alive and is the only one who can reveal the secrets of God.

Why is Jesus worthy to open the scroll? (see 5:9)

Jesus was obedient to God even to the point of death. It is because of his sacrifice that we have salvation. But before we get there, let's remember that this news hasn't always been available for all generations. Before Christ, countless generations wanted to understand the things we know today.

Read 1 Peter 1:10-12

What do these verses say the prophets and those who went before wanted to know?

How hard did they search to find out?

We know the Gospel...many of us have grown up with it our whole lives. The temptation is that once we hear it enough times it can start sounding normal.

How is the Gospel about as far from “normal” as you can get?

Immortal God became mortal man and served humanity even to the point of shedding his blood in our place. The guiltless one took on our guilt! Amazing.

Why is it important that we are reminded just how special the Gospel of Christ really is?

Application

If the Gospel is that important that angels and prophets searched to find out what it is all about, what does that say about how we should search the scriptures now that we have them in full?

How might you keep scripture in front of you this week so that you can get more in the habit of reading?

Exercise: Spend some time this week looking up Old Testament prophesies of Jesus. There are hundreds of them and it builds our faith to read them and realize these things were written 800-1000 years before Christ!

Lesson 8 – Salvation Through Jesus Christ

Jesus came into the world at a time that was perfect for the spread of the Gospel. Here are some things that were going on in the world at that time that helped the Gospel spread in a time when communication was word of mouth and the fastest way to get somewhere was a horse or a ship (blown by the wind!)

- Exile – the Jews had been scattered all over the world by the Babylonians 600 years before. This meant that when Paul and others travelled, they could find Jews and synagogues in cities all over the Roman empire. synagogues all over the world who were reading Torah/OT
- Pax Romana – Roman peace
- Roman Roads – allowed for relatively easy travel
- Common language – Greek (you could go almost anywhere and talk with people)
- Location – Israel is at a crossroads that all sorts of trade went through in Jesus' day. That brought people of all backgrounds there to that region.

Read Rom 5:6 – It was an ideal time and place for Jesus to come into the world

Jesus was God in the flesh

Jesus led a very special life. On one hand he was divine but he was also human. It is vitally important that we believe both of those things. Some people have believed Jesus was only divine and only appeared to be a man. Others have argued Jesus was a man but wasn't divine. In order for Jesus to die for our sins and overcome death he has to be both man and God.

Read John 1:1-14

What does this teach us about Jesus' divinity?

What does this teach us about Jesus' humanity?

You find this same point in Hebrews 1 (Jesus was fully divine with all authority) and Hebrews 2 (Jesus was human like us).

Read Hebrews 1:1-2 & Heb 2:14-18

What do we learn about Jesus in these verses?

Why did Jesus have to be human in order to forgive our sins?

Why did Jesus have to be divine in order to forgive our sins?

Jesus came to bring salvation to the world. – overcoming death required the perfect sacrifice to die. But God is immortal. So he took on flesh through Christ so that he might suffer and die in our place. In order to overcome death he had to have the power of God to defeat Satan, the one who “holds the power of death” in order to free us from sin (Heb 2:14-15).

Now that is good news because it is about God bringing salvation to mankind through Jesus Christ. The next few lessons are going to talk about how God saves us through Christ.

Application

If Christ has freed us from the fear of death and from sin, why do we still struggle with sin the way we do? How might this group encourage you through those struggles?

What things in your life do you need to let go of in order to embrace God more fully?

Lesson 9 – What is Redemption?

We sometimes hear Christ referred to as a redeemer. A redeemer is someone who brings redemption. Those aren't words you use every day. What do they mean? If salvation is what God does for mankind, redemption is how God does it.

How would you define redemption? (it is ok to be unsure...that is why we have a lesson on it!).

Redemption is an economic/marketplace word. It basically means the payment of a debt. We use that word sometimes to talk about using coupons. You can "redeem" your coupon at participating stores. That means that if you turn in the coupon they hand you something in return. It is a transaction.

How do you think salvation is like a transaction?

Read Mark 10:45

Mark doesn't use the word redemption here but he uses a word that goes with redemption. He uses the word "ransom" which is the price of redemption. **1 Cor 6:19-20** tells us that we aren't our own because God bought us at a price.

What does Paul say should be the result of our recognizing that because God bought us we are no longer our own?

Read Ephesians 1:3-7

"redemption through his blood" – what does that mean?

It means Christ's blood stands in the place of our blood. It should have been us on the cross. Instead he took on the punishment for our sins because of God's grace and has brought us forgiveness of sins! Praise God!

If you are a Christian, you have been redeemed. Your sins have been forgiven. But notice a few verses later Paul says there is another part to redemption – **Read Ephesians 1:13-14**

He says there is more redemption on the way...the final redemption of God's people when Christ returns. So we are saved. We are forgiven. Christ's sacrifice has paid our sin debt but there is more redemption ahead...the redemption of us fully into God's presence. **Ephesians 4:30** calls that the "day of redemption."

If you are a Christian, a price has been paid for your salvation through the death of Christ. He was the ransom payment for your sins and his death on the cross brings you forgiveness. This payment is a release...it is a setting free.

Last this transaction or purchase that God has made of us has brought us from one place to another – **Read Colossians 1:11-14**

Where did God redeem us from?

Where does God redeem us to?

Application

God has set you free...do we ever still act like we are slaves to sin?

How might you show God your profound appreciation for the work of Christ on the cross for you?

Christ glorified God through his obedience and we should do the same.

Lesson 10 – What is Reconciliation?

The word reconciliation has to do with broken relationships. *What does it mean to reconcile a broken relationship?*

Now when we think about salvation and the work of Christ we see that Christ is at work reconciling us to God.

Why is that important that Christ brings real reconciliation between mankind and God?

Read Romans 5:9-11

The word “justified” means made right. *What does Paul say reconciled us to God? How does Jesus’ blood do that?*

Paul says it was both the death of Jesus and his new life (resurrection) that reconciled us to God. *Paul says reconciliation is not something we earn but it is something we what? (vs 11)*

What does reconciliation with God do to us? (Read Colossians 1:19-23)

Before you know you need to be reconciled you must first understand that the relationship has been broken. *How has our relationship with God been broken? – Sin.*

Why were we alienated from God?

What does our reconciliation with God result in? (vs22-23)

What does this mean we are to do in response to this?

First, see Colossians 1:23 - *What does Paul say we must do in response to all of this?*

As Christians, we must persevere. We must finish the race. This reconciliation in Christ comes only by an abiding faith-"if you continue in your faith." Paul is saying that Christ started his work of reconciliation in us and we have to hold on to that.

Second, we carry on the reconciling work of Christ in this world.

Read 2 Cor 5:16-21

What is our ministry that flows out of Christ reconciling us to God?

Why is it important that we pass on to others what we have received from God?

How do we actually help reconcile people to God today?

Paul starts by saying the only way this is going to happen is if we stop seeing people in worldly ways. *What do you think Paul means by that...what are some worldly ways of viewing people?*

How does viewing people in a worldly way prevent us from reconciling them to Christ?

God isn't counting our sins against us...and yet sometimes we struggle to forgive others when they sin against us.

How might these verses help us be more forgiving?

How might your life look different if each and every day you saw yourself and your ministry as an ambassador of Jesus Christ?

Bottom line – God loved you enough to reconcile you back to himself and we have to, have to...do that for others. It isn't an option.

How might our small group be a reconciling presence in our neighborhood...drawing people closer to God?

Lesson 11 – The Resurrected Lord and New Life in Christ

The biggest question humanity has ever faced is how are we to overcome death. Every religion has its own answer to that question and most world religions say it is all up to you. If you live right, do right, meditate right or have enough good karma then you can ultimately become divine.

Christianity is the opposite. Christianity states on the front end that on our own we are helpless and hopeless. We cannot do enough good to defeat the grave. We need help from the outside, from someone with more power and authority than we have.

In walks Jesus. He is God in the flesh (John 1:14). He is fully human and takes on our sin on the cross in order to die and defeat death, putting death in its rightful place and giving eternal life to all who would believe.

Here is how Paul said it – **1 Cor 15:20-22**

Jesus shows that through his resurrection we too can be raised from the dead. That is the answer to the fundamental question of humanity. We don't defeat death. We don't have an answer for death. But God does and God has through Christ.

As Christians, we see death as a good thing because we know that our loved ones who are in Christ go on to be with the Lord. But it is important to remember that at its core, death is not the way things are supposed to be. In fact, God sees death as an enemy to be defeated (which He did through Christ). **Read 1 Cor 15:25-26**

Why is death our enemy?

Why is it important that death has been defeated?

Read 1 Cor 15:56-58

What does Christ bring over death?

Jesus' victory over death reminds us that death was a power to be defeated. Death is not our friend. Death is the enemy of God.

What does Paul say to do in response to this information?

3 things – stand firm, let nothing move you, always give yourself fully to the work of the Lord.

Do you ever have a hard time with any or all of those three things?

How might the resurrection of Christ and the defeat of death help you do those things?

If Christ has defeated death, what should you fear? The worst thing the world can do to you is send you to be with God. In the first century the Romans marveled at how well the Christians died in the Coliseum. They died with peace and dignity because they had hope.

Read 2 Cor 5:17 and Galatians 6:15

What does resurrection have to do with us being “new creations” in Christ?

Read 2 Cor 4:7-12

How well do you relate with being an earthen vessel or pot that has a treasure from God in it?

Paul says that death and life work together. In order to live for God you have to die to self. In order for Christ’s resurrection life to be shown as at work in your life you have to first die to all things opposed to the Lordship of Christ. Jesus’ death and new life are both at work in us so that we can embrace the life that comes through Christ to those who have faith.

How is Christ’s new life revealed in us to those around us?

If people knew you before you were a Christian, they might be surprised to see the new life you have found in Christ. It is hard to deny it when a real and obvious difference is made in someone’s life. Or maybe you have been a Christian pretty much your whole life...and it doesn’t seem like much has changed. Realize that every single day Christ makes a difference in your life.

Application:

What in your life do you still need to “die” to?

Who is someone you know who needs to hear the good news about resurrection and forgiveness?

Prayer – Pray that God will empower us to live for him 100%.

Lesson 12 – Our Response: Faith and Obedience to the Gospel

How would you sum up the Gospel message at this point?

When people in the Bible heard the Gospel message they were convicted by their own sinfulness and their need to turn to Christ for salvation. That conviction is called faith. The Bible repeatedly talks about salvation coming to people who have faith in Christ – **Rom 3:22, 28; 5:1-2, Eph 2:8, etc**

Faith is more than just believing in Jesus – even demons do that (James 2:19). Faith is active and is reflected in a life that is committed to Christ. In other words, faith is expressed through obedience to the Gospel- the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ-1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

Read Acts 2:36-38

How does someone believe in Jesus and obey the Gospel? The answer is found in Acts 2:38 which explains how to respond to the gospel, how to believe on Jesus as Lord and Savior, and how to obey and apply the gospel personally. Through repentance we die to the old life of sin (Romans 6:1-2). Through water baptism by immersion in the name of Jesus Christ, we are buried with Christ (Romans 6:3-4). By receiving the Holy Spirit, we receive new life in Christ (Romans 7:6; 8:2).

Repenting, being baptized in water, and receiving God's Spirit also corresponds to Christ's teaching about faith. When we believe the gospel we will repent (Mark 1:15). When we believe on Jesus we will be baptized (Mark 16:16), and we will be filled with the Holy Spirit (John 7:37-39).

Repentance

Repentance is a turn from sin to God (Acts 26:18-20). It includes recognition of sin (Mark 2:17), confession of sin to God (1 John 1:9), godly sorrow for sin (2 Corinthians 7:10), and a decision to forsake sin (Proverbs 28:13)

Water Baptism

The Biblical significance of baptism is as follows: (1) God remits sins at water baptism, erasing the record of sin and canceling its penalty (Acts 2:28; 22:16). (2) Baptism is part of the new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). (3) Baptism is part of personal identification with Christ (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27). (4) Baptism identifies us with Jesus' burial (Romans 6:4).

Holy Spirit

Baptism with, by, in or of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit) is part of New Testament salvation. The Scriptures teach that speaking in tongues is the initial evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:4; Mark 16:17; Acts 10:44-47; Acts 19:6). When we receive the Holy Spirit, we receive power to overcome sin, walk in holiness, and be witnesses (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:4, 13).

The basis of salvation is Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, which is the gospel. As we respond to the gospel and believe on Jesus Christ, we will repent of our sins, be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We will close this lesson with a look at repentance in the life of the Christian. Repentance is not just something people have to do to come to Jesus. Repentance is also a regular part of the life of Christians. If you read the first three chapters of Revelation, you will read messages God had for 7 churches in the first century. In those 7 messages, Christians are told to repent 6 times! Repentance isn't something you do once to become a Christian and then you are good. Repentance continues throughout our lives.

Why is regular repentance an important part of the life of each and every believer?

What does it show about our heart based on our willingness to or not to repent?

The common element in all four of these things (faith, repentance, baptism and the Holy Spirit) is that we submit to Christ's Lordship.