

Jesus is the Gospel

Romans 1:1–4; Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 19

Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #11

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GOD has spoken in his Word. Let us confess its teaching in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 6, questions and answers 18–19:

Q.18. Then who is this mediator—true God and at the same time a true and righteous man?

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who was given to us for our complete deliverance and righteousness.

Q.19. How do you come to know this?

A. The holy gospel tells me. God himself began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later, he proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets and foreshadowed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and finally he fulfilled it through his own beloved Son.

As Martin Luther nailed his *Ninety-Five Theses* to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, one of them said this: “the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God.”¹ What should be a treasure can easily become trite to us. Knowing what it is and recommitting ourselves to it is the remedy.

Gospel means good news. *Whose good news?* We’re bombarded with the idea that Jesus was a man-made myth. What does Paul say? He says the

¹ *The Annotated Luther*, 1:42.

gospel is **the gospel of God** (v. 1). It's not the religion of Paul but **of God**.

That's why our Catechism says, **God himself began to reveal the gospel...**

Gospel means good news. *Good news about what?* Many people hear us say “gospel” and think we mean “love God and neighbor’ or “do unto others as you would have them do to you.” But these are fruits and results of the gospel. The gospel is the good news that a holy God saves us sinners by his Son Jesus Christ. Jesus is the good news.² Our Catechism has been focusing our hearts and minds on the amazing truth that Jesus is our mediator who satisfies the righteousness of God and therefore reconciles us to God. Now it asks how we know this. We know our sin and misery, as Q&A 3 said, by the law; but we know our Savior from sin and misery by the gospel.³

Foreshadowed in the Old Testament

This gospel was *foreshadowed in the Old Testament*. What if I told you that you were the heir of an ancient kingdom in Africa? That would be a stupendous claim! But what if I then showed you your family tree, tracing you back and back, and then I showed you pictures and documents

² John Calvin, *Commentary*, 15. See also *Institutes* 2.9.2 where Calvin contrasts the general sense of “gospel” being “all the promises by which God reconciles men to himself” with the proper sense: “By the Gospel, I understand the clear manifestation of the mystery of Christ...Paul...claims for the Gospel the honourable distinction of being a new and extraordinary kind of embassy, by which God fulfilled what he had promised, these promises being realised in the person of the Son...he has in his flesh completed all the parts of our salvation.”

³ See Bastingius on the proper distinction of law and gospel in Q&A 19. 21 col. 1–2.

chronicling this kingdom and how it all led to you? The New Testament makes a stupendous claim about Jesus. But it doesn't just make it up. He is traced back through ancient prophets who preached and wrote of a Savior to come. The gospel *is foreshadowed in the Old Testament*. Look at verse 2, which says God **promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures**. Hebrews 1:1–2 says, “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” Our Catechism gives us a handy outline of the history of the gospel:

Paradise

Beginning in *paradise* we have foreshadowings of Jesus Christ. In the midst of pronouncing his judgment on Adam, Eve, and the serpent, the Creator spoke the good news that a son would be born who would crush the serpent (Gen. 3:15).

Patriarchs

Later in the time of the *patriarchs* or ancient fathers, the Lord foreshadowed this son by adding to the promise. To Abraham the Lord spoke of blessing all the nations through this son (Gen. 22:18). And that promise was passed down from Isaac and Jacob until Jacob's son, Judah, was told that from his family line would come a king (Gen. 49:10).

Prophets

More foreshadowings of this son who would be king were added in the times of the *prophets*. To David the Lord made a promise that he would have a son to sit on his throne forever. Micah was told that king would be born in Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Isaiah was told he would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14). And to David, Isaiah, and Daniel we learn that he would die by crucifixion (Ps. 22; Isa. 53; Dan. 9) yet be raised again (Ps. 22; Isa. 55).

Pictures

And throughout those generations were given foreshadowings of this death of the king on behalf of his people in *pictures* through priests, sacrifices, and the holy places of tabernacle and temple.

When I think of how the Old Testament foreshadows my Lord, I am filled with wonder! So much more than an ancient kingdom in Africa, my God has planned and orchestrated the millennia of human history to bring his Son, Jesus Christ, to this world for me! Amen?⁴

Fulfilled in Jesus Christ

This gospel that was foreshadowed in the Old Testament *is fulfilled in Jesus Christ*. The gospel that Paul was set apart for and that the prophets promised long ago is **concerning** [God's] **Son** (v. 3). Again as our Catechism

⁴ See Bastingius on “the antiquitie of the doctrine of Christ.” 22 col. 1.

says God **fulfilled** [the Gospel] **through his own beloved Son**.

I think one of the dangers we need to always guard against is talking a lot about “the gospel” but doing it in an impersonal way. We say things like, “The gospel saves. The gospel sanctifies. He preaches the gospel.” But what do we mean by this? It ends up becoming a hollow slogan and meaningless mantra.

We get closer to the truth when we speak of the gospel as being Jesus Christ himself. All that the Old Testament foreshadowed was about the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul says elsewhere that it is “*him* we proclaim” (Col. 1:28); “How then will they call on *him* in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in *him whom* they have never heard?” (Rom. 10:14); “for I decided to know nothing among you except *Jesus Christ* and *him* crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2); “for all the promises of God find their Yes in *him*” (2 Cor. 1:20).

Why is Jesus such good news? Because, as Paul says in our text, he **was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead** (vv. 3-4). This interesting contrast between

“flesh” and “Spirit” is not between what is physical and immaterial, but between two phases of his life. He **descended from** the ancient Jewish line of king **David according to the flesh**. This is what we call in theological terms his state of humiliation. But in his being raised **according to the Spirit of holiness** he was **declared to be the Son of God in power**. This is what we call his state of exaltation.⁵ And that word **declared** is used to mean that the Son of God in human flesh was appointed to an authority he did not have in his humiliation; he was appointed to the place of power as **the-Son-of-God-in-power**. That’s his title now!

So how do you and I know that Jesus is able to be the mediator between God and us sinners? Because he’s fulfilled all the foreshadowed promises and prophecies in the Old Testament. And those promises say that a Savior would come who would do everything I cannot do to save me. That’s why Jesus is the good news of the gospel! Amen.

⁵ On the debate on the meaning of verses 3–4, see Schreiner, 41–45. See also Luther, 35–36; James Philip, *The Power of God: An Exposition Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Didasko Series (Glasgow, Scotland: Nicholas Gray Publishing, 1987), 18–19; Stott, *Romans*, 50–51.