

February 11, 2018

The Gospel We Proclaim

1 Cor. 1:18 – 2:5

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, He was buried, and he was raised on the third day.

LTS. 1 Cor. 15:3-11

For the past five weeks we have been talking about Gospel Urgency. And the climax of that discussion came last week when we met together for the Gospel Urgency Conference. Over the course of three days we refreshed our souls on the call to gospel urgency, its motive, attitude, passion and reward. But at the end of the weekend as I was enjoying some fellowship with the speakers it occurred to us that all of those expositions, and encouragements won't amount to a hill of beans if we don't have a firm grasp on what the gospel is. So, this morning, as kind of a final message in this Gospel Urgency series, I want to finish by reminding us what the gospel message is.

This is especially important in our day because there is so much misunderstanding about the gospel.

- For some the gospel message is that God wants to end world poverty
- For others its disease that God intends to eradicate Some people believe it is the means to prosperity and realizing one's fullest potential.
- For many, the gospel is a call to mutual love, civility, and racial equality
- For still others the gospel is the message that an all-loving, non-judgmental God accepts you just as you are, is okay being thought of in whatever terms you like, and would never, ever ask you to change the unique and special you that you know you really are to you.

Of course, some of these views are so absurd we would be right to think that no true Christian would ever offer them as the true gospel. Nevertheless, many people hold to a gospel that says something about Jesus, something about the cross, and something about salvation, but falls short of the true gospel of Jesus Christ found in the Scriptures. So, let's spend a few minutes together thinking about the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

There are a number of ways we could approach this goal, but this morning I want to borrow the simple structure Greg Gilbert offers in his little book, What Is the Gospel. That structure has four simple points:

God, Man, Christ, Response.

As you attempt to share the gospel with people, I think you'll find this simple structure is easy to remember and helpful for offering the message with clarity and authority.

In the true gospel the most important part is what it affirms about...

I. God:

1. Sometimes in an effort to make the gospel sound appealing, people tend to stress the personal benefits of a relationship with Christ. Statements like, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life" are common. And while it's true that those who trust Christ stand to gain much, the reality is the gospel begins not with man, but with God. In fact, in the most biblical consideration, the gospel is about God from beginning to end, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to Him be the Glory forever! Amen."

2. At the beginning of the Gospel message stands the Almighty, sovereign, King over all creation. He made everything, and He rules over all. This is what we learn from the very first words of the Bible (Gen. 1:1), "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

3. Taken at face value, this truth is obvious. We all know by nature that the complexity and beauty of the natural world around us comes from God. Paul makes the case for this in Rom. 1:19 where He argues that

"what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse."

4. As you are sharing the gospel with people, you're bound to run into some who call themselves atheists and say they don't believe in God. I just like to respond by saying "Well, this may come as a surprise but actually God doesn't believe in atheists." God designed into the very fabric of every human being a built-in understanding that God exists. How else do you explain the fact that every culture that has ever existed has worshipped a deity? You can't escape the truth that God is, but you can suppress it. And the reason people suppress the reality of God is clear: it's because they love their sin and want the freedom to do it without any guilt or moral restraint.

A. Jesus explained it like this: "This is the judgment, that the light came into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light for their deeds were evil."

B. The reason people reject the gospel is NOT because they don't believe

there is a God but because they love to sin.

5. This is where the Gospel begins. There is a God. Furthermore, there are some basic things we should know about God. First of all, God is good. Again, when we look at the first pages of the Bible you find God creating man and placing him in the kind of environment that was absolutely perfect for human flourishing. Every tree in the garden was planted there specifically to bless the man and his wife. In fact, God commanded them to eat of all the food they could find in the garden and be satisfied.

6. He also gave them sweet companionship by creating them male and female; two people who by design fit together and complement one another perfectly. Not only that but He commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. And because doing so would bring them much pleasure, we can infer that he was commanding them to enjoy one another to the fullest!

7. And even on the one occasion when God commanded them NOT to eat from one particular tree, He didn't do it to deprive them of something good but to protect them from something harmful. You see, my friends, this God who created all things is good.

8. But there is a Second thing we need to know about God; namely, that He is Holy. As we saw in Isaiah (6:3) a couple weeks ago, God is Holy, Holy, Holy! And that means two things. It means he is transcendent and infinitely higher than us, and it means that He is the very definition of moral perfection. He is holy and righteous in all his infinite attributes. As the prophet Habakkuk said (1:13), "His eyes are too pure to look on evil; and He cannot look at wrong." That is to say, nothing sinful can come into His presence without experiencing His righteous judgment.

9. Now, let's point out the obvious. No sinner likes this attribute of God. It frightens us. It offends us. We prefer to think about Him as a God of love and compassion and forgiveness! And indeed, those too are attributes of God. We know this from all the way back in Exodus 34 where Moses asks God to show him His glory? God responds by proclaiming His Name, saying,

The Lord, The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin (v.6-7).

10. Now that's the kind of God we like, right? Doesn't everyone want that kind of God? Of course, we do! But... I actually failed to read verse 7 to its completion. I cut off the last phrase where it says, "Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished" (v.7). (read that again...)

11. Why? Why doesn't God leave the guilty unpunished? Look up here for a minute: Why doesn't God leave the guilty unpunished? Because He is Holy, Holy, Holy, and He is righteous, and just in all he does.

A. Think of a notorious criminal of recent days; one whose committed a

terrible crime that was witnessed by many. How would the people in that community respond if the judge at his trial pronounced him innocent and let him go free in the name of compassion, grace and love.

- B. I tell you, that community would be justifiably scandalized and outraged! They would march in the streets and demand that the judge be removed from office. Why? Because his decision was a breach of justice. The role of a righteous judge is to protect the innocent and to punish the guilty. This was an unjust judge.

12. But God is no unrighteous judge! God is righteous altogether. He is Holy, Holy, Holy! And therefore, cannot leave the guilty unpunished. It would be unjust and sinful to do so, and we all know that by nature.

13. My friends, this is the God of the gospel. If we make Him out to be something other than this kind of God, then we create a false gospel. There is a God. He is Good. He is holy.

6. The second category of the Gospel is...

II. Man

1. What do we need to know about man? First, we need to know (Gen, 1:26) that Man was created by God and in the image of God. To say that man was created in the image of God means that God shared some of his unique attributes with man that he didn't share with the animals. For example, humans, unlike animals, are capable of love, mercy, justice, and goodness. We can speak, and reason, and have a strong sense of right and wrong. We possess these qualities because God shared them with us. And the reason He shared them with us was so that we would set his glory on display in the world.

2. Once again, this points to God's lavish goodness to man. God actually created man in such a way that he could enjoy wonderful, joyful, satisfying fellowship with God. Like God, man was (in the beginning) without sin and therefore free to interact with and enjoy God's presence. But that all changed when Adam sinned.

3. Once again, in the book of Genesis we learn what happened. Adam and his wife absolutely understood God's warning (2:17) "In the day you eat of it you shall surely die." They understood that God was in charge. He was their creator King and they were accountable to Him. But the serpent came along and stirred up feelings and desires for that which God had forbidden for their own good.

4. Eating the fruit was not merely a breach of an arbitrary law. It was a repudiation of God's right to rule over them. It was the rejection of God's wisdom and authority in favor of the dictates of their own desires. It was a declaration that they believed their own lusts were a better guide than

God. They were, in effect, declaring their independence from God. And so, God gave them over to what they wanted. He let them have their independence, and their relationship with God was broken.

5. For that reason, they were put out of the garden to have what they desired more than God. And ever since then every human born into the world is by nature a sinner. Every human baby comes into the world in the condition Adam wanted; namely, willfully rebellious to God's rule. As Paul explains, (Rom. 5:12) "Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all me because all sinned."

6. Someone will say: That's not fair! Why should I suffer because of Adam's sin? But we all know what it's like to suffer because of the actions of another.

I recently heard the testimony of a man from Australia. Can you guess why he was born and raised in Australia? It wasn't his decision to live there. Given the choice he may have chosen to be born in Texas. His ancestors were from England and he would have been born an Englishman, except for what his great, great, grandmother did 180 years ago. Turns out she was a thief, and one day she got caught. In those days English criminals were sent to Australia for incarceration. This kind of thing happens all the time. To some Habakkuk said (1:13), "His eyes are too pure to look on evil; and He cannot look at wrong." That is to say, nothing sinful can come into His presence without experiencing His righteous judgment.

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B. And so it is with humanity. The actions of our original parents are the original cause for our spiritual predicament. We are born sinners, and we (like them) love to sin. We have a natural bent toward sinning. Like Adam and Eve, we want to live independently from God's rule. The problem is, to live independent from God means we live apart from God not only in this life but forever. The final and eternal destiny of every independent, rebellious, sin-loving human being is a place of ultimate separation from God where the unremitting experience is the fire of His Holy justice forever.

7. But what can be done? How can a sinner become righteous? To be welcome into God's presence, Jesus says, "You must be perfect even as your heavenly Father is perfect?" But that's hopeless? We've already mess that up! We can't undo who we are and what we have done? How can anyone be saved? With man it is impossible. But nothing is impossible with God.

8. This brings us to the third major category of the Gospel. We've talked about God who is both infinitely good and holy. We've talked about man who knows in his heart of hearts he's a sinner worthy of God's wrath. Now we come to...

III. Christ

1. For sinners there are two things they desperately need, don't have, and can't earn. They need forgiveness of sins and they need restoration of the righteousness lost. This is where Jesus comes in.

Read Rom. 3:21-26

3. Notice (3:26) how careful God is to do this right. He will NOT be a unrighteous judge who arbitrarily pronounces the guilty innocent. He must NOT only justify sinners, but He must justify them in a manner that is truly just. If the wages of sin is death (6:23) than sin must be punished by death. And this God accomplished for the sinner (by grace) in the death of Jesus Christ.

4. How can a man or woman be acquitted of their guilt? Only by death. Jesus died in your place. How can a man or woman acquire perfect righteousness? Only by a perfectly righteous life. Jesus lived in your place.

5. Paul famously ties it all together in 2 Cor. 5:21, "God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." By this we understand that when Jesus died in the cross, God treated him as if he lived my wicked rebellious life so that he could treat me as if I had lived Jesus perfectly righteous life. And this brings us to the final component...

IV. Response

1. In John 3:16 we learn that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

2. The only way to receive the forgiveness and righteousness God offers is by the humble and absolutely dependent hand of faith. Why? Because, as Paul explains in Eph. 2:8-9

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

3. The justification we so desperately need comes to us by Faith Alone! What does that faith look like? Again, in Romans 10:9-10 we read

if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart

a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

4. This is what saving faith looks like. The only acceptable response to the gospel is a kind of humble faith that hangs its hope utterly, and entirely upon the Lord Jesus Christ. It's the kind of faith that repents of self-righteousness, repudiates self-rule, and surrenders to the Lordship of King Jesus.

Conclusion:

1. Beloved, these are the essential building blocks of the gospel. And you might be thinking, "But I'm no theologian! What hope do I have that I can effectively deliver the message of the King?"

6. That's a great question. And for the answer I want to close by having you turn to 1 Cor. Chapter 1:26ff.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, ³¹ so that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

- A. What I want you to see here, beloved, is that God is the one who unites sinners to Jesus savingly. "It is by His doing..." Salvation is always a sovereign act of God. Nevertheless, faith comes by hearing the word of Christ, and hearing always follows telling.
- B. The question is, who is qualified to tell this glorious gospel? And Paul's answer is here. God has chosen the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, people who are nothing in the eyes of the world. Why? So that no man may boast before God. So that all the glory will be God's alone.
- C. You may say: But I'm afraid to share the gospel with the people I know? Is there any help for that? Well, let's keep reading (1 Cor. 2:1).

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. ² For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. ³ I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, ⁴ and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵ so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

- A. Paul didn't arrive in Corinth like a fearless, champion. He came to them in weakness, and fear, and trembling, and his presentation wasn't impressive. You see, it's always the message, never the messenger that saves. We are merely called to get the message right. We don't add anything to it to make it more appealing. We don't delete anything from it to make it less offensive. We offer it to people the way we find it in the Bible.
- B. Was Paul afraid to speak? Yes, he was. But notice what he did (2:2), "I determined (I made up my mind, I resolved) to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified."
- C. It's okay to be afraid. There's a difference between being ashamed of the gospel and being afraid to share the gospel. It's possible to faithfully share the gospel even when we're afraid. Being ashamed of the gospel is when we let our fear keep us from sharing when God gives us opportunity. That's why Paul can confess here in 1 Cor. 2 that he was afraid, but in Rom 1:16 he could also say, "I am not ashamed of the gospel..."

7. Oh my friends, as Damon Cupp preached last Sunday, we are ambassadors for The King. We live in a country that is not our own, and we carry a message that we must deliver; namely, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4). This is The Gospel we proclaim.

8. May we be found faithfully delivering the message when He comes.