

## What Is the Gospel? (Part 1)

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2023 Passion Week / Gospel; Christ / 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

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# Introduction

This is Passion Week in which we particularly remember the final week of Jesus Christ.

Throughout this 2023 Passion Week, I want to consider the following text written by the Apostle Paul: [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#).

# Scripture

Let us read [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#):

<sup>1</sup> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. <sup>9</sup> For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup> But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. <sup>11</sup> Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

# Lesson

Jesus is arguably the most significant person in all of human history. He is the central figure of Christianity.

Jesus is so significant that we divide our Western calendar into the period BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini).

But what exactly are the core beliefs of Christianity?

The Bible is a big book that contains lots of teaching about different subjects. If you want to get down to the very essence of Christianity, what is it all about?

Paul wrote in [1 Corinthians 15:1-2](#), “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” Paul said that he was about to state the essential message of what it was that transformed the Corinthians. It was the gospel.

[1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#) teaches us what is the gospel.

There are four parts to the gospel.

Tonight, we will only consider the first point.

## I. The Gospel Is about Christ (15:3a)

First, the gospel is about Christ.

Paul wrote in verse 3a, “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ...”

For Paul, the gospel was all summed up in Christ. Everything else in the paragraph explains Christ. It points back to Christ. It is found in Christ.

Now, before we go further, let me explain what the word “gospel” means. The Greek word for “gospel” (*euangelion*) means “good news.” In ancient times, they did not have the internet, cable TV, or newspapers. Someone would go into the town square and herald the important news for the people to hear.

When the Greeks engaged in mighty battles against intruding enemies, the people back home would wait nervously for news of the outcome. The people in

the cities would wait in terrified expectation to hear whether their army was defeated. Would they be conquered? Would they become slaves? Would they be dominated? Would they become exiles?

After the battle was won by the Greeks, they would send a messenger to shout, “We triumph!” That was *euangelion*. That was the news, “There has been a victory that has saved you from slavery!” That was gospel. That was “good news.”

The most famous example of this was that after the battle of Marathon, in which the Greeks defeated the Persians, a messenger was dispatched to take the good news to Athens. He ran a distance of about 26 miles and when he arrived in Athens, he shouted, “We triumph!” Then he dropped dead of exhaustion. (By the way, this story became the basis for the modern marathon race.)

Paul used the word “gospel,” as did the other Biblical writers, to announce the foundational Christian message.

In essence, the good news is that a battle has been fought and won, and now we are free from slavery. And that battle has been fought and won by Jesus Christ.

The core of Christianity is the gospel. And I want you to see that this is what makes Christianity different from every other religion in the world.

Every religion in the world has some key figure, as does Christianity for whom Jesus is the key figure. Mohammed taught the Five Pillars of Islam. Buddha taught the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment. Judaism insists on the teaching of Moses. And so on.

Every religion in the world gives you a set of directions of what you must do to be saved. The founders of all these religions are teachers and teach what you must do to gain entry to heaven.

But the core of Christianity is a gospel. That is, the essence of Christianity is good news. It is not a set of directions about what you must *do*; it is a historical account of what has been *done*. It is about what Christ has done.

Do you see how profoundly different Christianity is? One striking feature of our passage, [1 Corinthians 15:1-11](#), is that there is not one single command about what you must do to be saved. In this section, Paul does not even mention that you must repent and believe to be saved.

Now, of course, you must repent and believe to be saved. Paul said in verse 1, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand.” Technically, repentance and faith are *responses* to the gospel. They are not part of the gospel. Why?

“Because,” as Tim Keller says, “the gospel is that nothing you *can* do, nothing you *will* do, nothing you have ever done can be the basis for your acceptance with God. It all happens through what Jesus Christ has done” (Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive, 2012-2013* [New York: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013]).

This point is foundational. We must understand that the core of Christianity is the gospel. And the gospel is good news about what Christ has done to bring us into a right relationship with the Father.

We simply receive the good news that he has triumphed over sin and Satan. We take our stand on the good news that we are free from slavery to sin.

And as we do that, we will be profoundly transformed by the good news of what Jesus has done for us. The good news profoundly changes our hearts and minds and emotions. The gospel changes our identity so that we are new creations in Christ. The gospel frees us from our failed works-righteousness. And what glorious freedom that is!

## Conclusion

When a person gets in trouble with the law, he doesn't want a law book. Law books are important and helpful, but what that person really needs is a lawyer. He needs someone who knows the law and what is in law books and who can represent him in court. Without someone representing him in court, a lawyer, all that person has is information.

Similarly, every person needs someone who knows the Bible and can represent him or her before the bar of eternal justice. And the only person who can do that is Christ. Oh yes, we learn about Christ in the Bible. But unless we have a personal relationship with Christ, we are doomed.

Friends, the gospel is about Christ. Let us look to Christ alone so that we can know that we are saved alone by faith alone in him alone. Amen.